Wii™

MARIO KART Wii

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20th ANNIVERSARY

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1988 – 2008

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BOOM BLOX

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Punto

Race Monster Tanuki

Ably RockBreak Lv.3

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Yeah.
It's all thanks to
this guy.

Kaori

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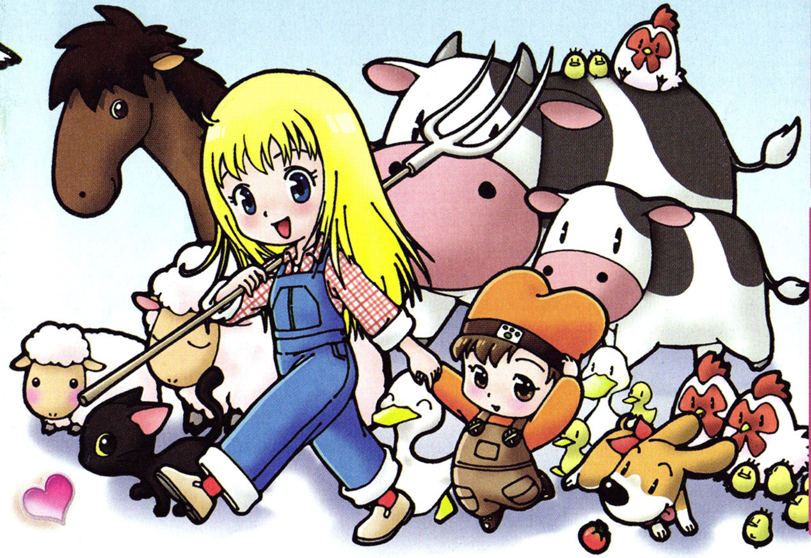
SU 21 (TU)
AM 8:20
Back
TIME 9.24
POINT 1899 1500

SP 4 (FR)
PM10 40
What a wonderful woman you are! Thank you...
Skye



EVERYONE

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Simulated Gambling
Use of Alcohol

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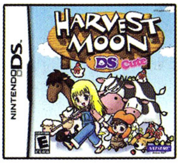
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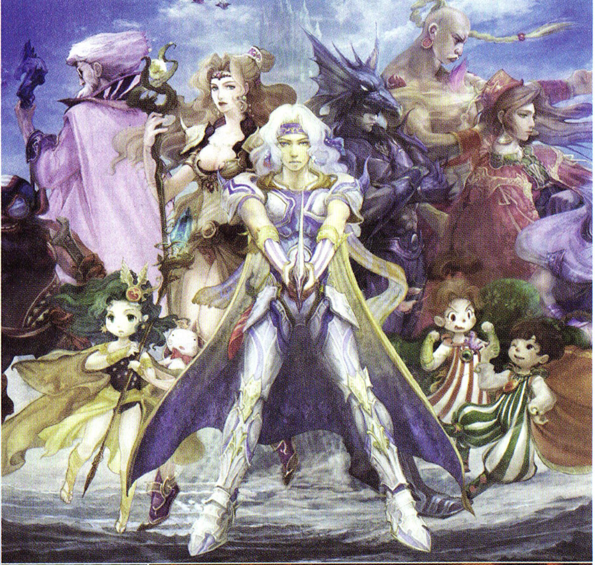

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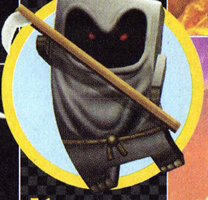

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"Atlus' sleeper in the making just might reinvent strategy RPGs..."
–1UP.com

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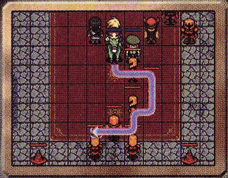
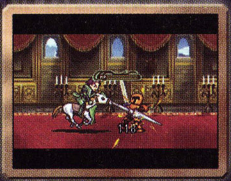
Tired of being hemmed in by standard strategy RPGs? Break out with the Route Maneuver System! With a fresh approach to combat, skill customization, and multiple endings, Rondo of Swords brings exciting new depth to the realm of handheld strategy.

Trace a path through your adversaries...



Attack enemy clusters along the route...



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Animated Blood
Fantasy Violence
Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

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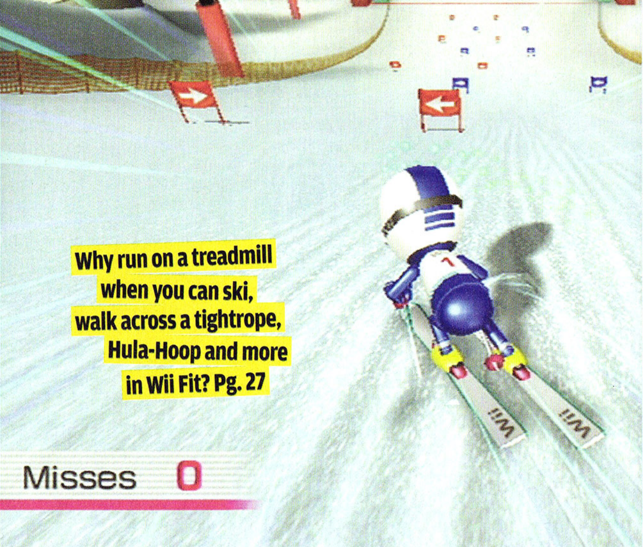

Why run on a treadmill when you can ski, walk across a tightrope, Hula-Hoop and more in Wii Fit? Pg. 27

NINTENDO POWER

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MAY 08

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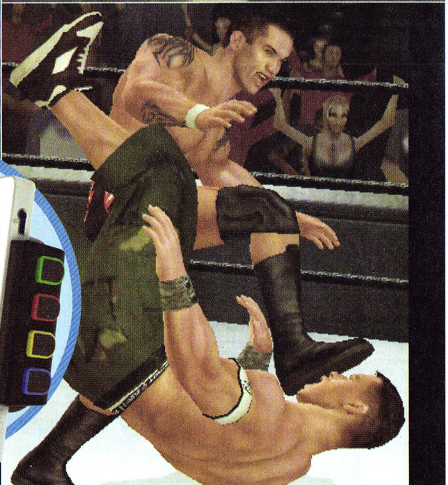

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WWE is back and ready to rumble on Wii and DS.

Rock on the go with Guitar Hero for DS! Pg. 13

TURN YOUR Wii™ INTO A TROPICAL GETAWAY

SUMMER SPORTS™
Paradise Island

10
Wii
SUMMER SPORTS
Paradise Island
DESTINEER
COMING APRIL 2008

7 Addictive Games

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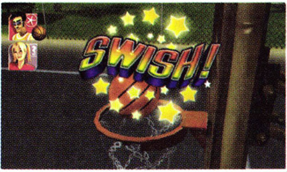
Bump, set, and spike your way to victory in beach Volleyball. Team up with friends or go head-to-head!



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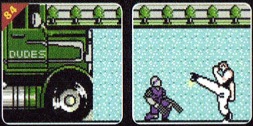
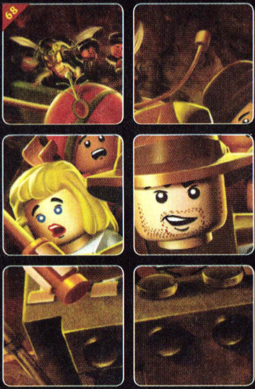
DS = NINTENDO DS
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare





27
Obese
Overweig
Normal
Underweig
BMI
22.42
Normal
Last BMI
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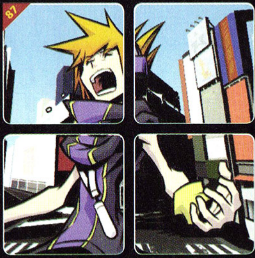
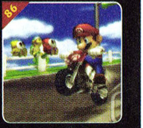
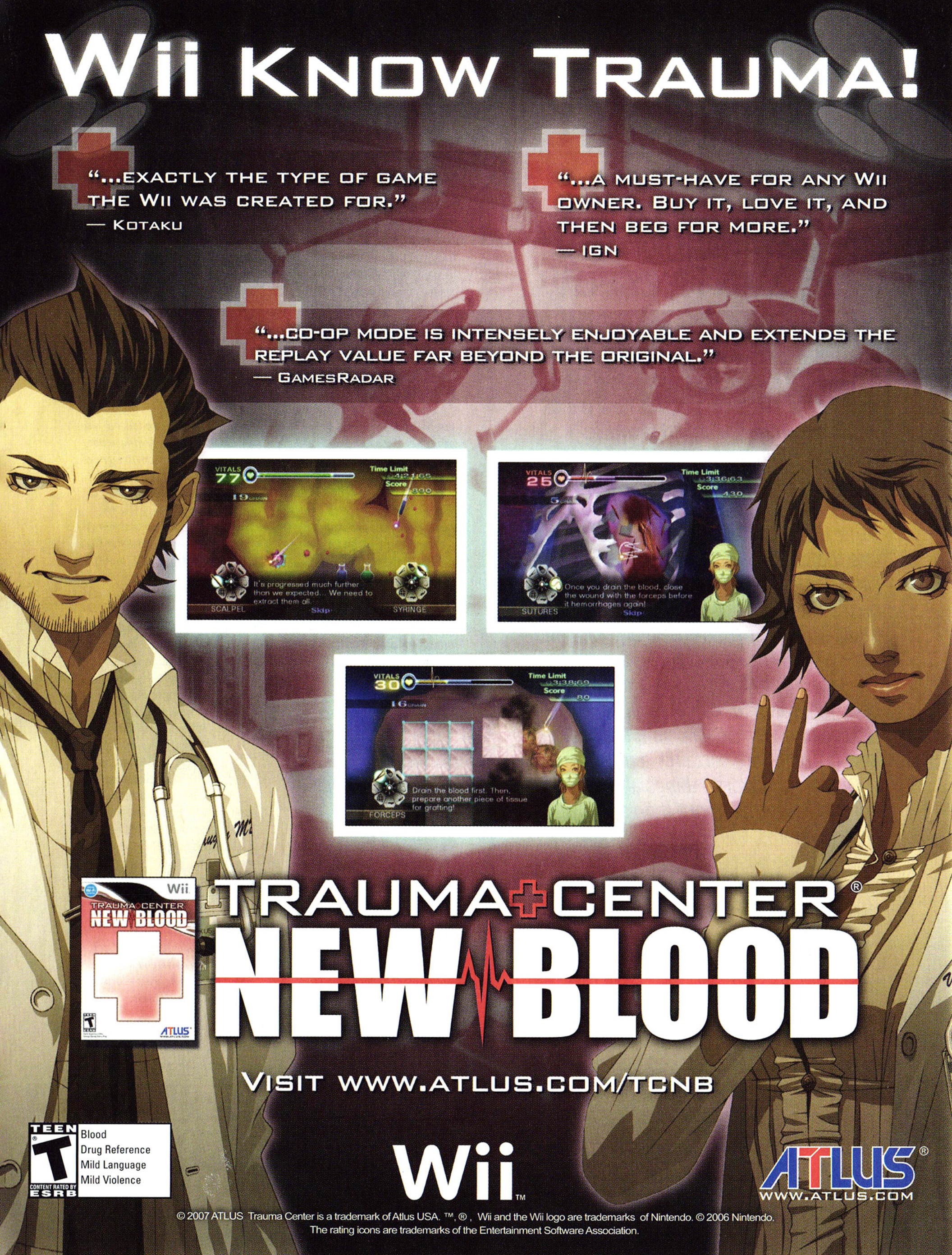
Normal





WII KNOW TRAUMA!


VITALS 77
Time Limit 4:21:65
Score 890
19 CHAIN
SCALPEL
Skip
SYRINGE
VITALS 25
Time Limit 3:36:63
Score 430
5
SUTURES
Skip
VITALS 30
Time Limit 3:38:69
Score 80
16 CHAIN
FORCEPS
Wii
TRAUMA CENTER
NEW BLOOD
ATLUS

It's progressed much further than we expected... We need to extract them all.

Once you drain the blood, close the wound with the forceps before it hemorrhages again!

Drain the blood first. Then, prepare another piece of tissue for grafting!

"...EXACTLY THE TYPE OF GAME THE WII WAS CREATED FOR."
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Drug Reference
Mild Language
Mild Violence

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Pulse

Past and Present

Players sometimes debate about whether a developer should devote its time to creating a brand-new game or to bringing back an old favorite. There's definitely room for both, but in some cases, I feel that classics absolutely have to be remade. This month's cover game, Final Fantasy IV, definitely falls into that category. This title (renumbered Final Fantasy II for its original US release on the Super NES) was the first RPG that really hooked me. Its engaging story and memorable characters make it one of the series' very best entries, and now a new generation of players will have the chance to experience it. (And the pretty new graphics are certainly a nice bonus.)

One of my favorite things about both Wii and DS is that, more than any other game systems, they bridge the gap between the past and present. In addition to their revolutionary new features, they still offer the types of gaming that longtime players grew up with: the best old-school franchises, retro titles, and 2-D graphics all live on. As much as I can't wait to see what innovations the future will bring, I hope that we never fully leave behind the types of games that we've always enjoyed.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

[LETTERS]

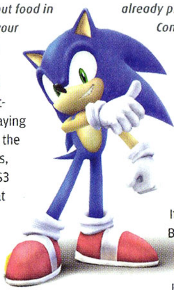
You guys must have been in a silly mood this month, as many of your letters are just rambling nonsense. Not that we don't love the funny, but we've got a special request this month for stories of how you first got into Nintendo gaming. Write us at the address on pg. 10, and we'll print our favorites. Now to this issue's mail—let the wackiness ensue!

PAC-POOCH

All of you there at Nintendo Power headquarters must have had an animal mess up at least one of your games. If you haven't, you can step into my shoes since my dog ate one of my favorite titles. What would you guys suggest that I do to protect my other games?

[NO NAME GIVEN]

I asked around, and, luckily, no one here has lost a game to a pesky pet. Chris Hoffman's rat did pee through the vents of his Sega Genesis, but, miraculously, the system survived. My guess is that your dog wants attention, is very hungry, or is just dopey that way. Make sure to put food in his bowl and keep your games out of reach.



SONIC GLOOM

Sonic games are getting worse. After playing Secret Rings on Wii, the late GameCube titles, and the new 360/PS3 games, I believe that Sega is putting a creative and iconic character into an early grave. Why can't they make games like the 2D Genesis titles, with awesome soundtracks, mute characters, and high-speed/controllable gameplay? Maybe something like a Paper Mario-type Sonic game. Any of you guys agree with me on this?

WAMOO

Strong words, Wamoo! I think I'll bring Steve in on this, since he's our resident hedgehog defender:

STEVE: Oh yeah? Well, your letter is getting worse. After reading it, I couldn't help but think that this correspondence deserved an early grave. So why don't you stick....

CHRIS: OK, thanks Steve! Anyway, Wamoo, have you tried the Sonic Rush titles for DS? Those are much closer to the blue blur's earlier games than to his recent console outings.

FOX HUNT

I am shocked that Nintendo hasn't announced a new Star Fox game for Wii since I'm pretty sure that it would be a big hit. Most of my friends love Star Fox. (Hey, Chris, please write a humorous response.)

WOLF ODONNELL

First of all, I have to say that I'm surprised that Fox's biggest enemy, Wolf, is such a fan. I'm also always up for more Arwing action, although there isn't anything new on the horizon just yet. For now we'll have to settle for fighting as Fox and friends in Super Smash Bros. Brawl (assuming that you've already played the cool Star Fox Command for DS, that is).

BOWSER BASHING

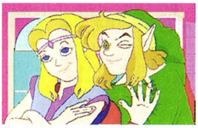
Whenever I have to fight Bowser in a Mario game, it never feels like he is trying to win...or that he's just really wimpy. It's not that I want Bowser to crush Mario, but he could at least try! I mean, he could level the Mushroom Kingdom with Bob-ombs! What do you guys think? Should he try harder at being evil?

PATRICK R.

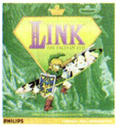
Bowser's mood swings from one extreme to the other, from deadly threat (Super Mario Galaxy) to cuddly grump (Super Paper Mario). Maybe a Koopa Queen could get him to settle down and forget about hassling Princess Peach. Any takers out there, ladies?

PUZZLE PRO

After beating almost every puzzle in Professor Layton and the Curious Village, I have to say that it changed my life. I look at everything as a puzzle now: my homework, walking my dog, choosing the fastest driving route, etc. Thank you, Nintendo, for mak-



The failed CD-i system taught us one important lesson: nobody should publish Nintendo games except Nintendo.



ing me an obsessive-compulsive puzzle solver!

FRANK R.

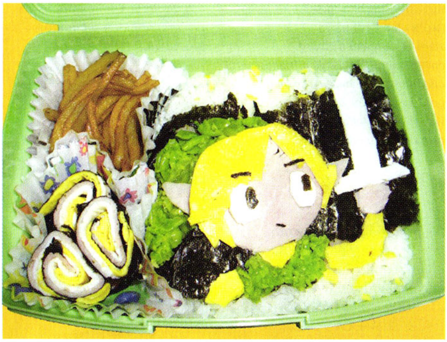
We're witnessing the birth of either a new Einstein or a new Riddler—side with the forces of good, Frank!

LINK LUNCH

Here's a photo of a lunch that I made yesterday [see below]. I'd never done a character bento before, and I knew it had to be a really good character, so I made Link. It was really fun! Although, it took forever to get those little pieces of nori the right shape. Oh, and the side dishes are mini soy sauce fries and ham-egg rolls. People usually send in photos of birthday cakes and such and you guys feel left out because you didn't get to eat any of them, but you probably wouldn't have enjoyed this as much. I'm curious: has anyone ever sent you Nintendo-themed food in the mail?

LENA

That photo is awesome, Lena! How could you have possibly devoured such a work of art? To answer your question, I've had readers mail in slices of cheese, and someone once sent me a Chick-fil-A sandwich. The results from both were, unfortunately, an inedible mess.



The Legend of Zelda: Bento Adventure unfortunately came to a quick end as Link's sword was no match for a pair of chopsticks and a hungry Lena.

SOME GAMES SHOULD STAY IN THE PAST

Will Virtual Console ever get CD-i games? I'd love to get a good laugh from those terrible blunders.

SLIPPY

Laughs are the only enjoyment you could get out of these clunkers. For those that don't know, Phillips was allowed to publish games based on the Mario and Zelda series for its CD-i system, as a part of its deal to work with Nintendo on a CD-ROM attachment for the Super NES (which never materialized). Thankfully, the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation were released soon after the CD-i and brought its short shelf life to an end. Look at the pictures above and shudder at the thought of a future that could have been if the CD-i had stayed in the game.

BRAWL FAVORITES

Hey, Chris: Sorry to pull you away from Super Smash Bros. Brawl, but I'm curious—who is your favorite character in that game, and why? PS: If this gets published my friend owes me five bucks.

BRAWL-VIRUS

I'm always happy to help readers score a couple of extra bucks! To answer your question, I'm most comfortable playing as Link (I love his broad range of crushing sword attacks and projectiles), but I'm also loving Ike's strength and the unique attacks of Snake and Sonic. There aren't many characters that I don't enjoy playing as, actually.

It's really cool that Capcom is giving Okami a second chance at success on Wii. I think that Nintendo should follow Capcom's example with some of its old series (*cough* Kid Icarus, StarTropics, EarthBound). Ahem—excuse me, I have a cold.

PGROCK

I must have caught your cold, PGRock, because my coughs sound just like yours. While I have no clue whether Nintendo might one day return to those series, I'd love to visit those worlds again. I'd especially like to see the return of Punch-Out!! since both the Wii and DS would fit that game beautifully.

WHERE ARE THE GIRLS?

I can't believe how sexist Nintendo Power has gotten! A few years ago you had at least a few women working for you, but now there isn't even one! Women deserve rights equal to those of men! I will not rest until we get them!

PETEY PIRANHA

We appreciate your enlightened view, Petey—especially considering that you are a male man-eating flower. Our five-person editorial team is indeed all guys, but don't forget Candace English, our invaluable copy editor. Women also have key roles in other NP departments such as sales, circulation, and marketing. They may work behind the scenes, but they are all vital to the magazine's continuing success.

OF KONG AND CAKE

Dear awesome (but not as awesome as Scott Pelland) person who answers the Pulse letters: I'm in a bet with my friend. Is Donkey Kong a gorilla, or is he a new species of ape? Please clarify this for us. There's delicious cake on the line!

KILAYBAY

I know that Scott is on a whole special level of awesomeness, but geez, you could at least address me by name! I don't suppose that I'll be getting any of your delicious cake, either. Under these circumstances, I'll just say that your friend is correct, whichever side of the argument he's chosen. If I can't have cake, neither can you!

RABBID FANS

I wanted to share a picture of my six-year-old brother, Harrison, wearing his Raving Rabbid Halloween costume. Raving Rabbids 1 and 2 are the *best!*

The head is enormous but surprisingly lightweight as the frame is constructed of Styrofoam and

All my younger brother ever plays are Zelda games. He has gone through Wind Waker seven times, Ocarina of Time five times, Phantom Hourglass three times, and never stops playing the Phantom Hourglass online minigame. I have failed at getting him to try other great series—he even refuses to play Super Mario Galaxy! What can I do to get him to enjoy other games?

RYAN O.

While I can't fault a Zelda fan for his love of such a great series, it is a shame that your brother is missing out on so many other amazing games. Try getting him to play as the Zelda characters in Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Maybe through experiencing that game he'll develop an interest in Nintendo's other wonderful worlds.

wire mesh. We also added fake fur, acrylic-painted Styrofoam eyes and teeth, and a brand-new plunger. We had a blast making it, and you wouldn't believe how many people recognized the rabbid!

WILL B.

Wowzers! Not only is that a great costume, but just think of the fun that you'll have torturing your brother with this photo when he's older! You could show it to his dates, or even slip it into a video shown at his wedding!

AN INACCURATE CRITICISM

In issue 225 I noticed an error on page 37 in the sentence, "How do you merge that with **an** RPG?" Now, tell me, Chris Slate—can you see the word that I darkened? Huh?! It's darkened because it is incorrect! It should be "a" RPG. Any more mistakes like that and you'll be hearing from me again! You hear, Chris Slate?!

IHATECHRISSLATE

Clearly, your hatred of me has clouded your vision. Surely you know that "an" is used before any word that starts with a vowel sound? (In this case, the "ahr" sound in RPG.) Perhaps you should change your name to "I'mSorryChrisSlate."

FUTURE FASHION

I have come from the future, in the time machine that I stole from Chris Shepperd, to tell you about Super Princess Peach 2. In this game, Bowser steals everyone's fashionable outfits, so Princess Peach has to team up with Daisy to get the Mushroom Kingdom's clothes back. (Don't worry; everyone conveniently found a barrel to wear.) While playing through the game's 49 levels you get new outfits for the princesses that grant them special powers like floating or fast running. I decided to tell you this because, (A) I am a nice time traveler, and (B) I want to see you squirm when it gets delayed three times.

J.D. "HIRO" B.

Wait—does everyone get their own barrel to wear, or are they all stuffed into a single giant one? Don't leave me hanging!

WHAT A LIFE

Do any of you wish life was like a game? Like, instead of waking up for work, you have to protect a summoner. Monsters would be everywhere you turn, and whenever you get hurt you'd cast healing spells. I wish life were like that.

TIDUS 599

Call me weird, but I don't want to be attacked by monsters.

MORE FIRE EMBLEM?

Recently I heard of a DS remake of the very first Fire Emblem, which starred Marth of Super Smash Bros. Brawl fame. I am an *extremely huge* Fire Emblem fan, and I want to make sure that this is true.

DAN C.

Nintendo did reveal a new Fire Emblem title for DS in Japan a few months ago, although the game has not yet been announced for a North American release. We'll be sure to keep you updated on any developments.

STANDING UP FOR LINK

There may be millions of Zelda fans out there, but I'm the only true one at my school. All of my friends and family members either hate or dislike Zelda. When playing a game of Super Smash Bros. Melee, my friends will gang up on any Zelda character that I pick, so I almost never win. My family asks why I'm always using a dude in a green dress, and they keep calling Link "Zelda." I know more about the Zelda series then anyone I know, but no one cares. Should I consider this a blessing or a curse?

[NO NAME GIVEN]

Yikes—talk about a hostile environment! Maybe your friends and family pick on Zelda so much because they know it's an easy way to get a rise out of you. Don't give them the satisfaction!

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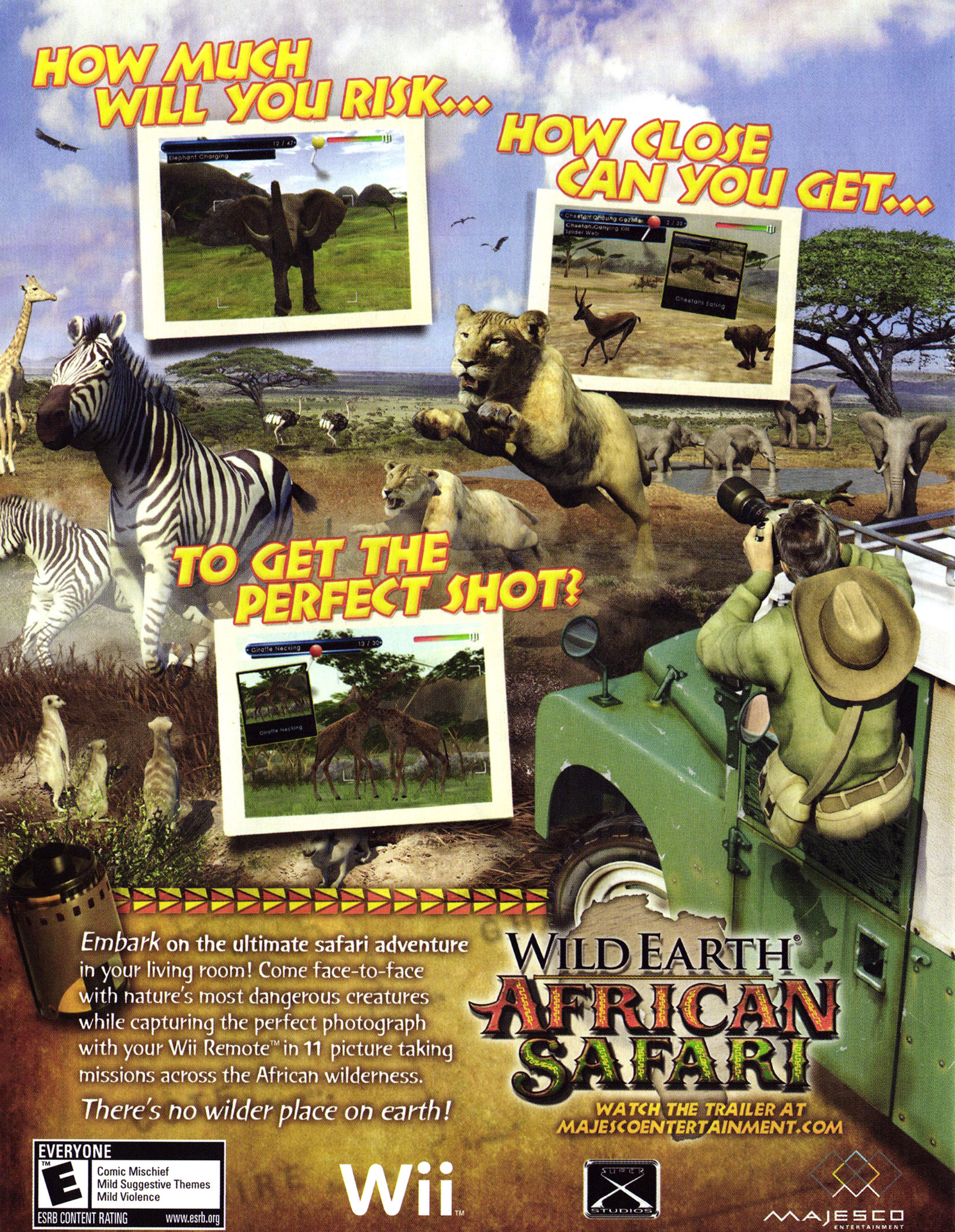
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HOW CLOSE CAN YOU GET...
TO GET THE PERFECT SHOT?
Elephant Charging
12 / 47
Cheetah Chasing Gazelle
2 / 35
Cheetah Carrying Kill
Spider Web
Cheetahs Eating
Giraffe Necking
13 / 30
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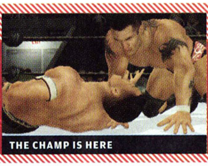
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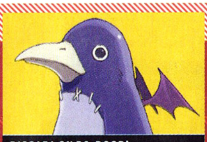
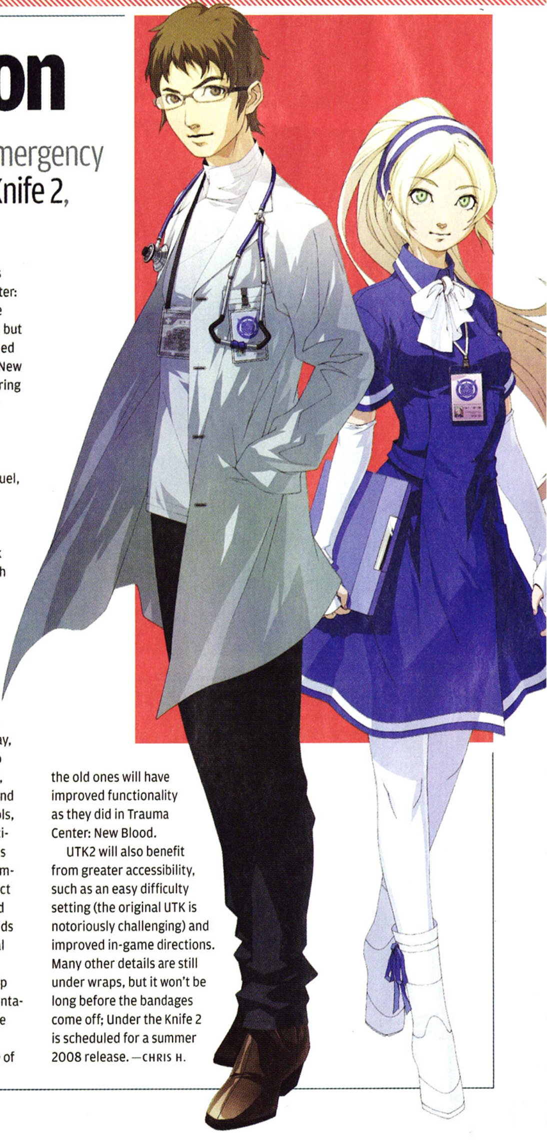
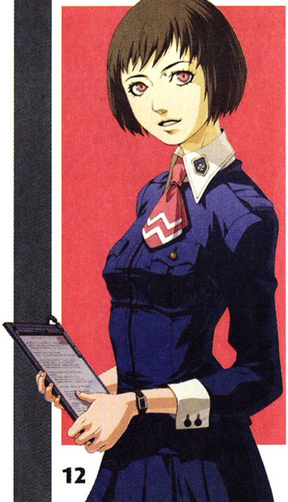

DISGAEA ON DS, DOOD!

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Like a Surgeon

Dr. Derek Stiles heads back to the emergency room in **Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2**, the direct sequel to the DS original.





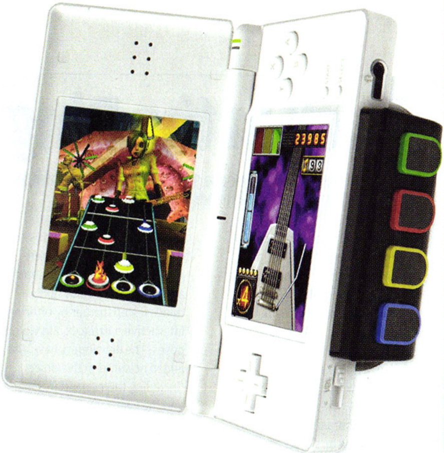
The hospital isn't traditionally a place where you want to find yourself, but in 2005 Atlus changed that with their hit DS game Trauma Center: Under the Knife. Featuring intense reflex-based, touch-controlled action, the game put players into the scrubs of Dr. Derek Stiles, a young surgeon who was enlisted by an organization called Caduceus to use his medical talents and amazing "healing touch" ability to save all manner of patients and attempt to eliminate a bizarre disease known as GUILT. Under the Knife introduced many gamers to a new gameplay concept—saving lives instead of taking them—and Atlus followed up the game's success with two Wii titles: Trauma Center: Second Opinion (essentially the same game as Under the Knife, but with Wii controls and some added elements) and Trauma Center: New Blood (an indirect sequel featuring a similar story but with all-new characters and operations).

Nearly three years after the original's release, the series is returning to DS for a direct sequel, appropriately called Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2. Dr. Stiles, along with his assistant, Nurse Angie Thompson, is back in the starring role, dealing with new operations, a new story, and characters both new and old. Though GUILT has been eradicated, its effects still linger; the plot focuses on the aftermath of the epidemic and the unanswered mysteries surrounding the devastating virus. The gameplay, meanwhile, stays fairly close to its roots. As in the original UTK, you'll use the stylus to access and control a variety of surgical tools, including a scalpel (to make incisions), sutures (to stitch wounds closed), forceps (to extract harmful materials), a syringe (to inject medication), ultrasound (to find tumors), a drain (to remove fluids such as blood or pus), a surgical laser (to eliminate malignant growths), and bandages (to help the patient heal). Atlus representatives haven't said if there will be any new tools in the game, but they have confirmed that some of the old ones will have improved functionality as they did in Trauma Center: New Blood.

UTK2 will also benefit from greater accessibility, such as an easy difficulty setting (the original UTK is notoriously challenging) and improved in-game directions. Many other details are still under wraps, but it won't be long before the bandages come off; Under the Knife 2 is scheduled for a summer 2008 release. —CHRIS H.

Hero to Go

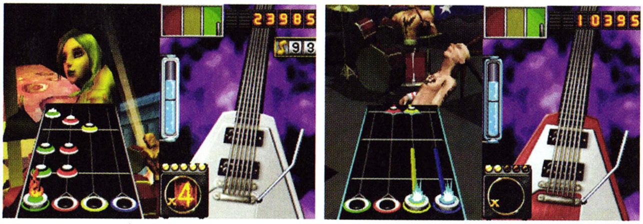
Rock out wherever you are with **Guitar Hero: On Tour** for DS.



It's no secret that Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock is a huge success on Wii—it's been high on the sales charts since its release last October. Now publisher Activision and developer Vicarious Visions are bringing the franchise to the DS with Guitar Hero: On Tour. But how will a series that's famous for its guitar peripheral work on the dual-screened handheld?

With a peripheral designed specifically for the DS, of course. Using the familiar fret buttons (though only four of them—tough luck, orange-button fans), the Guitar Hero Grip allows the game to have that beloved Guitar Hero feel while still being portable. Based on the screenshots we've seen, it looks like you'll use the touch screen to hit the whammy bar and strum the strings. You could use the DS stylus or your thumb if you wanted, but what Activision calls a pick-stylus is included in the package to make it feel more like you're playing an actual guitar. Of course, we're surmising that you'll hold the DS more like a book than a guitar to play the game, so you might not feel as much like a rock star as you'd like. Nonetheless, the positioning makes sense given that you wouldn't be able to see oncoming notes very well otherwise.

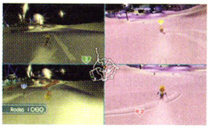
As you might expect, On Tour features a single-player mode in which you take a character through five new venues to become a rock god(dess). With six characters to choose from, it's a smaller roster than in previous games, but two of the characters are new to the franchise. As with the preceding Guitar Hero games, however, the real fun comes from the multiplayer experience. Via local wireless, you can either go head-to-head using new Battle Items or play cooperatively with a friend. No word yet on the track list, but Activision says it will include some alternative, classic rock, and pop songs. Expect more to be revealed as Guitar Hero: On Tour nears its summer release date. —JUSTIN C.



Even though the game's missing one button, we still expect Guitar Hero: On Tour to be about as challenging as the previous games. Try not to break your DS if you get frustrated.

Winter Wonderland

Winter may be over, but you can still hit the slopes with **We Ski** on Wii. No lift ticket required.



Skis
Carving (Short)
Carving
Straight (Long)
Carving (Short)
Back
Please select a style.

The Wii Balance Board is a great piece of technology, and Namco Bandai's making use of it with We Ski: you can shift your weight left or right to steer your custom character (using the in-game character-creation system or your Miis) after using your Wii remote and nunchuk like stocks to gain momentum. (If you don't have a Balance Board, you can use a Wii remote and nunchuk to steer by turning both of them left and right like a pair of skis.) The really fun part comes when you go off marked jumps on any of the 14 runs, using the Control Stick for a 720 or moving the remote and nunchuk up and down for a daffy. Up to four players can get in on the skiing action (though the game is single-player-only when using the Balance Board) when We Ski hits store shelves in May. —JUSTIN C.

Back in the Ring

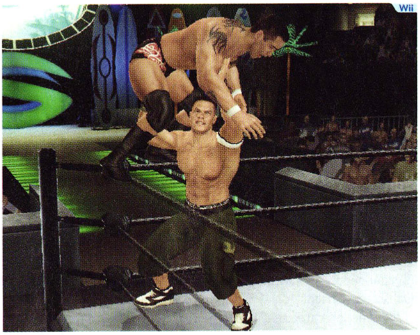
It's time to play the game once again—**WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009** is coming to Nintendo systems.

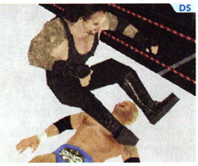
The biggest televised wrestling event of the year arrives each spring when millions of fans watch their favorite spandex-clad grapplers square off at WrestleMania. The biggest wrestling video game event, however, will occur this fall, when THQ releases WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 on Wii and DS. With new modes, an updated character roster, and more, this year's titles are packed with promise.

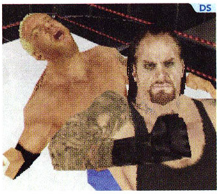
Developed by Yuke's, the Wii version builds on the foundation of last year's SmackDown vs. Raw offering, which boasted gesture-based strikes, grapples, and taunts. SVR 2009 takes things a step further by offering interactive entrances and victory poses. The developers have also added new interactive objects (including tables, ladders, chairs, and the ever-popular steel steps), new match types, and a new story mode that takes you down the road to WrestleMania. Up to four players can compete at once, and for the first time on Wii, you'll be able to battle online and take on all comers.

The TOSE-developed DS version, on the other hand, has been thoroughly revamped. Featuring a completely new play style, the game is controlled via the Control Pad in conjunction with the touch screen to create matches that should be more satisfying than those in last year's purely touch-driven affair. The character roster will be expanded as well, and you'll even be able to add your own grapplers into the mix thanks to a new custom-character mode. You can also look forward to an enhanced season mode in which you'll be able to upgrade your abilities in RPG-like fashion and complete specific goals in an attempt to gain legendary status.

So far, THQ has officially confirmed that Chris Jericho, Randy Orton, John Cena, the Undertaker, Ken Kennedy, Matt Hardy, and Jeff Hardy will be included as playable superstars, but favorites like Triple H and Batista are no-brainers. Details on additional characters—and other aspects of gameplay—will emerge as the game's release date draws closer. —**CHRIS H.**



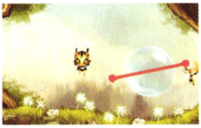


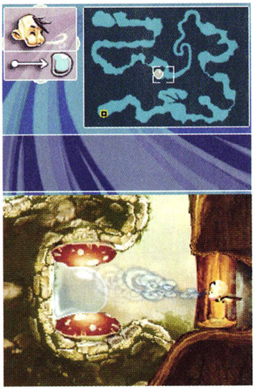


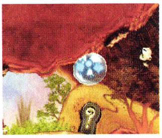
Spiritual Journey

Quirky new puzzle adventure **Soul Bubbles** floats onto DS courtesy of Eidos.

As the title-screen disclaimer warns, Soul Bubbles does not contain any licensed racecars, gang fights, or post-apocalyptic soldiers. Instead, this charming adventure from French developer Mekensleep tasks you with drawing bubbles around lost souls and guiding them to safety. You move the bubbles by slashing the stylus in the desired direction, and to get past certain obstacles, you'll sometimes need to join multiple bubbles together or cut them into smaller ones. You'll also need to deal with environmental obstacles; severing stray briars that latch onto your charge, for example. This spring release is a little bit reminiscent of PSP cult favorite Loco Roco, which is definitely cause for enthusiasm. —**STEVE T.**







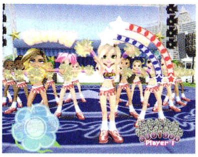
Bring It On

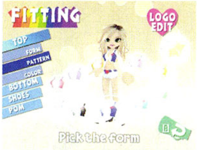
We Cheer, on Wii, shows that Namco Bandai's got spirit—yes, they do.

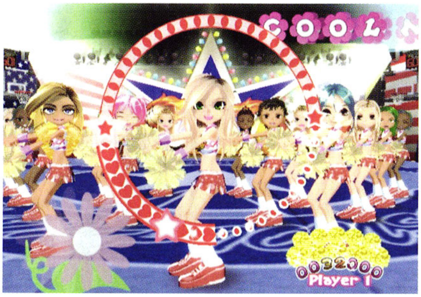
While we don't aspire to be cheerleaders, we admit that we had fun playing Namco Bandai's We Cheer. The game is not the over-the-top cheerleading of Elite Beat Agents style, but actual *cheerleading* cheerleading. With licensed music from pop artists like Hilary Duff and Aly & AJ, We Cheer is clearly geared toward the "tween" demographic, but it's also fun for adult gamers like us.

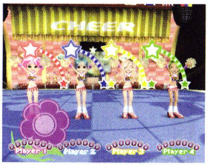
Using two Wii remotes like pompoms, you follow the onscreen commands (red for your right hand, blue for your left), moving your arms in half circles or spinning them in the air above and around your body. We're sure we looked ridiculous flailing about, but we enjoyed ourselves as we attempted to get higher scores. The multiplayer component was not playable in the version we tried, but the final game will support up to four players, with each player using one Wii remote. (There's also two-player co-op in which each player uses a Wii remote to control an arm.)

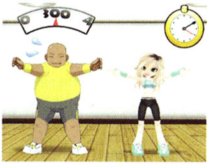
We Cheer will have a single-player portion, too, where you have your cheerleader—which you choose from one of 15 girls—participate in tournaments and unlock new teammates and songs. There's also an Exercise mode in which you become a personal trainer and earn money to buy new accessories and outfits for your character. If you're not a tween girl, We Cheer may not sound like the type of game for you, but it may surprise you if you pick it up when it's released this fall. —JUSTIN C.











Demonic Duels

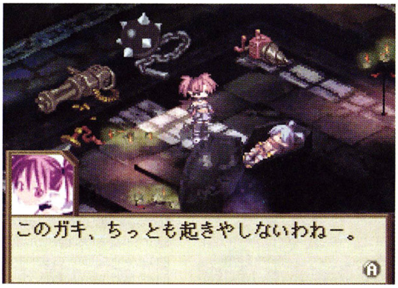
NIS brings the cult-favorite strategy-RPG Disgaea to DS.

Japanese developer Nippon Ichi Software (NIS) has been pumping out quality RPGs for years, and is probably most well-known for its groundbreaking strategy-RPG franchise Disgaea. A Disgaea on DS has long been rumored, but NIS America has finally made the official announcement.

Though it saw only a limited release, the original Disgaea, released on PS2 in 2003, earned critical accolades and became a cult classic—now, after a sequel and a port on Sony's PSP, few RPG enthusiasts don't know the name. The series is renowned for completely ignoring standard RPG conventions on level and damage caps, allowing players to level up their characters to level 9999 and deal hundreds of thousands of points of damage.

Disgaea DS is an enhanced port of the original Disgaea, much like Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness on PSP. It contains the entire original Disgaea game, as well as an alternate storyline starring secondary character Etna, some additions to battles (such as randomly generated items to enhance your units), and head-to-head local wireless competition. The DS version displays a grid on the upper screen, allowing players a new view of the battlefield so they can better formulate strategies.

Though it's not exactly a brand-new game, there are plenty of reasons to get excited about Disgaea DS, especially if you've never had a chance to experience the series before. Look for it in July. —TOM H.



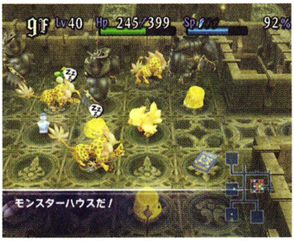
このガキ、ちっとも起きやしないわねー。

One for the Birds

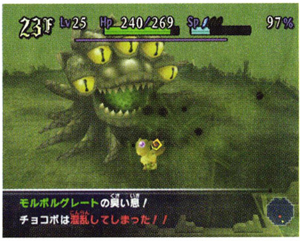
Final Fantasy's avian mascot gets his own Wii adventure with Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon.

Square Enix has finally confirmed a North American release for its Wii-exclusive dungeon crawler starring everyone's favorite overgrown fowl. Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon finds the titular bird and his travel companion Cid in a mysterious town where people lose their memories every time the clock tower bell rings. Being the fine feathered friend that he is, Chocobo risks life and limb to search for the misplaced memories in the surrounding labyrinths. Fortunately, our protagonist has more than his adorable visage with which to defend himself. By training in classic Final Fantasy jobs like Knight and Black Mage, Chocobo can learn a bevy of new abilities. You'll also find equippable items that boost the hero's stats and change his appearance. Progression through the randomly generated dungeons is turn-based—player and computer characters take turns moving, attacking, and using special abilities. Naturally, you'll encounter all manner of familiar series monsters during your travels, and the game boasts the sort of top-notch production values you'd expect from Square Enix. Look for Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales to hit shelves sometime this summer. —STEVE T.

20F
Lv 14
Hp 172/173
Sp
100%



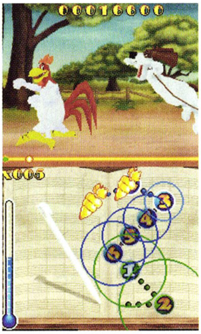
モンスターハウスだ！



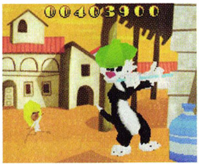
モルボルグレートの臭い息！
チョコボは混乱してしまった！！

Tunes and Toons

The Merry Melodies of Bugs, Porky, Daffy, and crew provide the soundtrack for DS touch-screen-triggered rhythm gaming in Looney Tunes: Cartoon Concerto.



Bugs Bunny's scrapes with Elmer Fudd and Daffy Duck may not have been as funny as they are without Carl Stalling's playful compositions keeping the pace between punch lines. So, it's fitting that you get to play the part of conductor in Looney Tunes: Cartoon Concerto, Eidos's just-announced rhythm game, which features scenarios and music from Warner Bros. classics. As the action plays out on the top screen, you tap your stylus to the music on the touch screen to ensure that the orchestra doesn't lose its way. It's like Elite Beat Agents in classic cartoon form. A successful performance earns you the right to watch part of the animated work from which the tune was taken. The music and mayhem will commence this June. —GEORGE S.



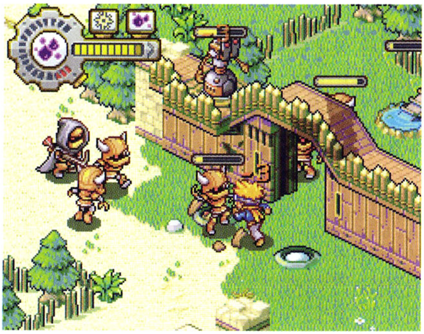
Rise of a Nation

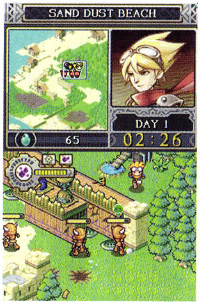
The makers of Drawn to Life return to DS with Lock Nation, a unique hybrid of action, strategy, and creativity.

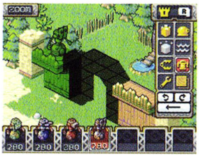
The first DS collaboration between developer 5th Cell and publisher THQ yielded Drawn to Life, a creative platformer that broke new ground through its do-it-yourself characters and objects. This fall the companies look to defy genre standards once again—in a completely different way—with Lock Nation, a real-time strategy game unlike any that's come before. In Lock Nation you play the role of Lock, an "archineer" (one with the skills of both an architect and an engineer) who is protecting precious Sourcewells against an army of clockwork enemies. To do so, you'll first fortify your defenses by placing a variety of walls, turrets, and traps (including ones that poison and freeze foes) among the existing architecture as you see fit. Selecting and positioning parts is simple thanks to the touch-screen interface, but you must be quick about it; you have only two minutes and limited resources to get everything set up.

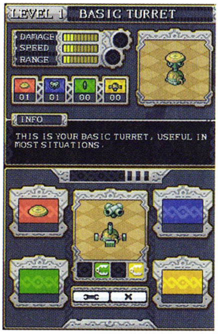
Once the building phase is over, the combat phase begins. As enemies attack, your automated defenses will keep them at bay, but you'll also get into the thick of the action by maintaining your emplacements, directly attacking foes, and collecting extra building materials. When you attempt to attack an enemy or repair a damaged structure, a quick touch-screen-based minigame—such as moving sliders back and forth or touching numbered switches in order— ensues, which allows you to complete the task at hand, and in emergency situations you can fight back with powerful elemental abilities (such as a lightning storm) that damage every enemy on the map. After you survive the onslaught, it's time to rebuild and refortify for the next day, but the enemy will do the same; the AI actually learns from its failure and adapts to the previous day's tactics.

Four areas (mountain, forest, beach, and swampy ruins) and 30 types of enemy units promise to contribute to a beefy single-player mode, and you'll also be able to challenge a friend over Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. —CHRIS H.

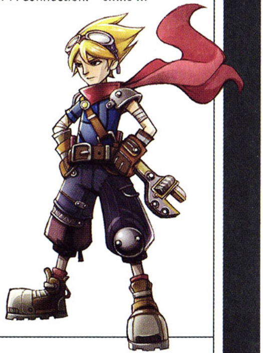








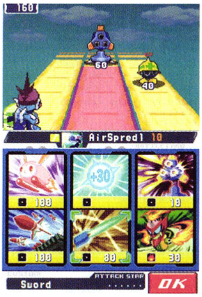
THIS IS YOUR BASIC TURRET, USEFUL IN MOST SITUATIONS.



Star-Crossed Sequel

Dinosaurs or ninjas? Pick your power in Mega Man Star Force 2 for DS. Too bad there's no pirates version.

As you may have noticed, Mega Man games get a lot of sequels. Year after year, Capcom's blue hero comes back for another installment, delivering familiar gameplay while adding just enough modifications to keep things interesting. But Mega Man Star Force 2 is more than that. It asks a question that will penetrate every gamer's soul: do you side with ninjas or dinosaurs? Do you play the Zerker X Ninja version and obtain the power of the Wood Ninja, or go with the Zerker X Saurian version and become one with the Fire Saurian? Or you could opt to gain the power of the Elec Zerker, but who'd want to do that? No matter which you pick, you'll be exploring the Wave World as Mega Man and the real world as his human host, Geo Stellar, while facing a new rival named Rogue and blasting viruses in strategic, action-oriented battles. Expanded online features are also on tap in this June release. —CHRIS H.



GAME WATCH FORECAST

With Mario Kart Wii's release, you might think that you have little to look forward to for the rest of the year, but there should be lots of announcements at July's E3.

Wii

Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	Namco Bandai	7/08
Alone in the Dark	Atari	6/08
BlastWorks: Build, Trade, Destroy	Majesco	5/08
Boom Blox	Electronic Arts	5/08
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	Ubisoft	6/08
Castle of Shikigami III	Aksys	4/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	6/08
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	Disney Interactive	5/08
Cooking Mama Cook Off 2	Majesco	6/08
de Blob	THQ	6/08
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	Eidos	5/08
Deca Sports	Hudson	SUM 08
The Destiny of Zorro	Pronto Games	TBA
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
The Dog Island	Ubisoft	5/08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	5/08
Dragonology	Codemasters	Q4 08
Emergency Heroes	Ubisoft	5/08
FaceBreaker	Electronic Arts	TBA
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	Square Enix	2008
Ford Racing Off Road	Empire Interactive	6/08
Ghostbusters	Sierra	Q3 08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	Activision	6/08
Heavenly Guardian	UFO Interactive	TBA
The Incredible Hulk	Sega	6/08
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
Iron Man	Sega	5/08
The King of Fighters Collection: The Orochi Saga	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Kung Fu Panda	Activision	5/08
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	Warner Bros. Interactive	2008
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	LucasArts	6/08
Line Rider	InXille	Q3 08
Littlest Pet Shop	Electronic Arts	FALL 08
Mario Kart Wii	Nintendo	4/08
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	Aksys	4/08
Monster Lab	Eidos	5/08
Mushroom Men	Gamecock Media Group	FALL 08
NCAA Football 09	EA Sports	7/08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	FALL 08
Okami	Capcom	4/08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	Konami	4/08
Rock Band	MTV Games	2008
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	Tecmo	6/08
Samba de Amigo	Sega	SPR 08
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution	2K Games	9/08
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Speed Racer	Warner Bros. Interactive	5/08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	LucasArts	SUM 08
Super Pick Ups	XS Games	4/08
TNA iMPACT!	Midway	6/08
Top Spin 3	2K Sports	Q3 08
Ultimate Band	Disney Interactive	9/08
Wacky Races	Eidos	6/08
WALL*E	THQ	6/08
We Cheer	Namco Bandai	FALL 08
We Love Golf!	Capcom	6/08
We Ski	Namco Bandai	5/08
Wii Fit	Nintendo	5/08
Wild Earth: African Safari	Majesco	4/08
Wizardology	Codemasters	Q4 08
Wonderworld Amusement Park	Majesco	6/08
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	FALL 08

NINTENDO DS

1 vs. 100	DSI Games	5/08
Bangai-O Spirits	D3 Publisher	Q2 08
Bleach: Dark Souls	Sega	SUM 08
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	2008
Brave	SouthPeak Interactive	Q3 08
Broken Sword	Ubisoft	9/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	6/08
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	Disney Interactive	5/08
Commando: Steel Disaster	XS Games	5/08
Crosswords DS	Nintendo	5/08
de Blob	THQ	2008
Dinosaur King	Sega	8/08
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Disgaea DS	NIS America	7/08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	5/08
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Double Sequence	DSI Games	4/08
Dragonology	Codemasters	Q4 08
Drone Tactics	Atlus	5/08
Final Fantasy IV	Square Enix	7/08
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: The Sealed Grimoire	Square Enix	TBA
Garfield Fun Fest	DSI Games	5/08
GRID	Codemasters	Q2 08
Guitar Hero: On Tour	Activision	SUM 08
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	Natsume	6/08
The Incredible Hulk	Sega	6/08
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	Aksys	5/08
Kung Fu Panda	Activision	5/08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	LucasArts	6/08
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	Warner Bros. Interactive	2008
Line Rider	InXile	SPR 08
Littlest Pet Shop	Electronic Arts	FALL 08
Lock Nation	THQ	FALL 08
LOL	Agetec	5/08
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Concerto	Eidos	6/08
Mega Man Star Force 2: Zerker X Ninja	Capcom	6/08
Mega Man Star Force 2: Zerker X Saurian	Capcom	6/08
Metal Slug 7	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Mister Slime	Southpeak	5/08
Moon	Mastiff	Q4 08
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	Gamecock Media Group	Q2 08
My Weight Loss Coach	Ubisoft	Q3 08
Myst	Empire Interactive	4/08
N+	Atari	4/08
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	Majesco	SUM 08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	FALL 08
New International Track & Field	Konami	2008
Ninjatown	SouthPeak Interactive	Q3 08
Organize It	Summitsoft	5/08
PipeMania	Empire Interactive	6/08
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	Nintendo	4/08
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	Nintendo	4/08
Prey the Stars	Koei	TBA
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	Konami	4/08
Professor Branium	Destineer	Q3 08
Puchi Puchi Virus	NIS America	4/08
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	D3PA	Q2 08
Quick Yoga Training	Ubisoft	4/08
Robocalypse	Vogster	SPR 08
Rondo of Swords	Atlus	4/08
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Shining Stars	DSI Games	6/08
Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution	2K Games	4/08
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	Sega	FALL 08
Soul Bubbles	Eidos	5/08
Spectrobes II	Disney Interactive	FALL 08
Speed Racer	Warner Bros. Interactive	5/08
SpongeBob SquarePants: Drawn to Life	THQ	Q3 08
Spore Creatures	Electronic Arts	9/08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	LucasArts	SUM 08
Summon Night: Twin Age	Atlus	5/08
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	Aksys	5/08
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	Namco Bandai	SUM 08
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys	Ignition	4/08
TrackMania DS	Focus Home Interactive	Q4 08
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	Atlus	SUM 08
Ultimate Band	Disney Interactive	9/08
Viva Pinata DS	TBA	TBA
Wacky Races	Eidos	6/08
WALL*E	THQ	6/08
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
Wizardology	Codemasters	Q4 08
The World Ends With You	Square Enix	4/08
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	FALL 08

NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE *TENTATIVE TITLE

BITS OF TID

Rock On!

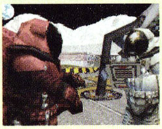
Surprise, surprise—Rock Band is coming to Wii.

Rumors and speculation about a Wii version of the über-popular Rock Band have been circulating since the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions' releases last year, but we finally got confirmation from publisher MTV Games that it's on the way. Expect more details in the coming months.

Necessary Roughness

Blood Bowl brings true fantasy football to DS.

If you've never heard of Blood Bowl, here's the skinny: it's a turn-based tabletop (think Warhammer) football game with fantasy creatures. And now it's a DS game, courtesy of developer Cyanide and publisher Focus Home Interactive. Use the stylus to coach and command one of eight races (Chaos, Dwarfs, Goblins, Humans, Lizardmen, Orcs, Skaven, or Wood Elves).



Moon Men

The Dementium developers reveal Moon on DS.

Renegade Kid's previous project was the spooky Dementium: The Ward, so you can expect lots of thrills and chills in the developer's latest first-person action-adventure game, Moon. Publisher Mastiff will release the game later this year.

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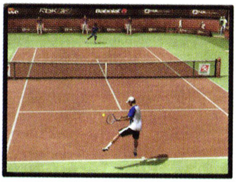
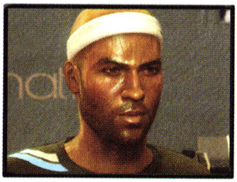
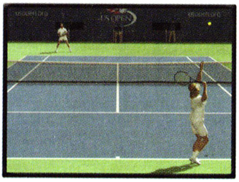


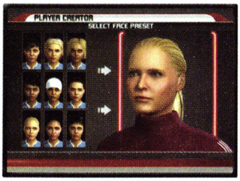
Easy to "Pick Up & Play" - Simple controls provide players with incredibly exciting, action-packed fun right from the start!



Evolutionary Visuals™ - Watch in real time as your players get progressively hotter, sweatier, and dirtier while competing at breathtaking venues.



Classic Legendary Players - For the 1st time ever play as your favorite pros from the past including Björn Borg, Boris Becker, and Monica Seles.



Unrivalled Player Creator - Create a player and make it your own with custom swing animations, a NEW free-form sculpting tool, and much more!

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Wii

NINTENDO DS

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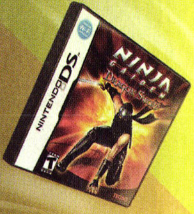
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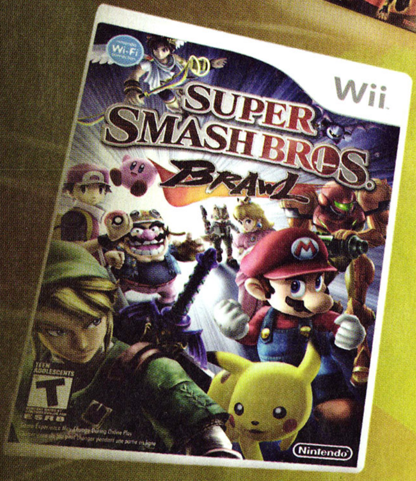
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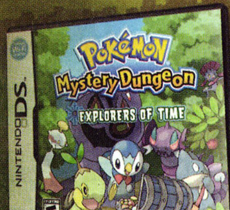
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Mystery Dungeon
EXPLORERS OF TIME
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The Pokémon Company
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GAME BOY ADVANCE

Wii Channels

WiiWare—original downloadable Wii games—is hitting on May 12. Here are some of the WiiWare titles you'll be playing near launch and in the months to come.

In This Section

WIIWARE
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King

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Defend Your Castle

WIIWARE
World of Goo

WIIWARE
LIT

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NEWS
Commodore 64 on Virtual Console Overseas

VIRTUAL CONSOLE GAMES

- DOREMI FANTASY: MILON'S DOKIDOKI ADVENTURE
- KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS
- NINJA GAIDEN III: THE ANCIENT SHIP OF DOOM
- PHANTASY STAR II
- PSYCHOSIS
- PUYO PUYO 2: TSUU
- SUPER TURRICAN

Fit for a King

Get the royal scoop on WiiWare title **Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King.**

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King is arguably the most anticipated game coming to WiiWare. With gorgeous visuals and the Final Fantasy pedigree, how could it not be? But unlike other Crystal Chronicles games, My Life as a King isn't an action-RPG—it's a creative simulation. We talked with producer Toshiro Tsuchida and director Yuji Kenichiro to get the details on this unique title.
—CHRIS H.

NINTENDO POWER How does the WiiWare format let you step outside the traditional Square Enix formula?

SQUARE ENIX The WiiWare format provided us with the opportunity to create a new type of game where we could focus on gameplay mechanics before devising a story and world setting. Later, when it was decided the title would be a Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles spin-off, we teamed up with some of the original series' staff members and worked on adapting our story to the original settings and themes...in essence, bringing it closer to a traditional Square Enix game.

What do you do in a typical session of playing My Life as a King?

Players take on the role of the king, and utilize a special magic known as "architek" to construct buildings for the citizens and adventurers living in the kingdom. To gain the power ("elementite") necessary to wield the aforementioned magic, as well as learn the construction methods of additional buildings, the realm's dungeons must be explored. Because the king himself cannot leave the castle town, players must issue behests to their kingdom's adventurers, then carefully select amongst the volunteers who shall set out into the wilds.

How do the controls work?

Because we believe that every player has his or her own preferred playing style, we chose not to restrict the game's controls solely to the Wii's unique interface. My Life as a King provides four different controller setups (Wii remote and nunchuk, Wii remote only, Classic controller, and Nintendo GameCube controller) allowing players the freedom to choose the scheme that fits them best. For example, when using the Wii remote, players only need to shake the controller to summon the kingdom chancellor and call up the main menu, much like a king might use a bell to summon his subjects.

How much control do you have over the development of the city?

By clearing dungeons, players can increase the number of building types available for construction. For example, to help adventurers efficiently complete their preparations for battles, players can build armor and weapon shops near the bulletin boards. Building bakeries near residential areas is one way to make shopping easier for citizens.

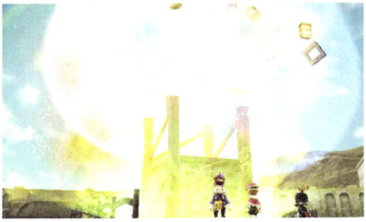
The player is left with the freedom to build whatever and wherever he or she wishes.

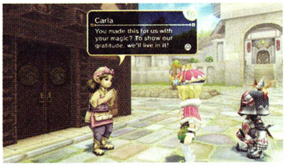
How does the game tie in to other Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles games?

Players will not be returning to the same locations that were introduced in the original Crystal Chronicles, but to another corner of the same world—now free from miasma, thanks to the efforts of the crystal caravans. But as it is set in the same world, fans will also be reunited with familiar characters, items, and monsters.

What do you consider to be fundamental Square Enix properties that carried over into the game?

That would have to be the unique world setting and the rich story carried by an array of appealing characters. And, this time, those aspects have been coupled with a fresh, new game design that our fans are sure to enjoy.



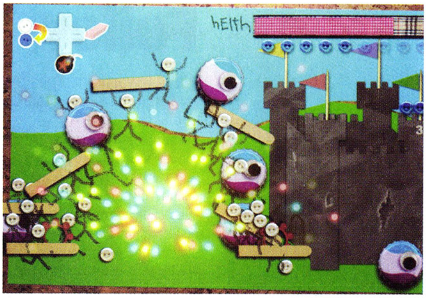


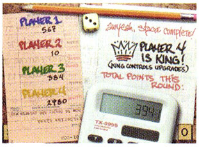
Carla
You made this for us with your magic? To show our gratitude, we'll live in it!

Lend a Hand

Defend Your Castle, the popular Web-based flash game, gets a makeover for WiiWare.

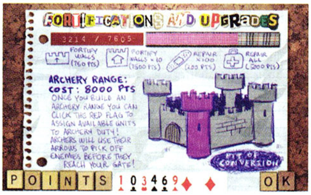
The concept of Defend Your Castle is simple—the title says it all. Waves of baddies are trying to destroy your castle, and you must defend it by picking up the invaders with an invisible hand via your Wii remote and flinging them away. Between rounds, you can fortify your castle or build structures such as a temple to convert your enemies to your side; once they're converted, you can assign your new recruits roles like archer or explosive martyr to help keep your castle safe.





The original Flash game was simple, addictive, and free—so why should you pony up cold, hard cash for the WiiWare version? Because developer XGen Studios has overhauled the game, giving it a fresh new aesthetic and additional gameplay features. "Defend your Castle for WiiWare features at least one new unit type and significant changes 'under the hood' to enhance and extend gameplay," says XGen Studios president and CEO Skye Boyes. "We took DYC back to the drawing board, re-creating it from the ground up to allow four-player cooperative multiplayer, a fun and challenging experience with the Wii remote, and improvements upon the best aspects of the original. The results are more massive waves of invaders and a game that plays much better for hundreds of rounds, while staying true to the original." If the drop-in co-op works as well as we hope, Defend Your Castle could be one of WiiWare's best party-game purchases. While you wait for it to release, you can try out the Flash version of Defend Your Castle at www.xgenstudios.com/play/castle. —JUSTIN C.

Defend Your Castle has the most unique visual style we've seen in a long time, capturing the indie spirit of WiiWare.



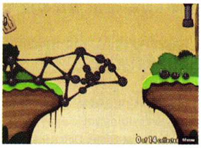
ONCE YOU BUILD AN ARCHERY RANGE YOU CAN CLICK THE RED FLAG TO ASSIGN AVAILABLE UNITS TO ARCHERY DUTY! ARCHERS WILL USE THEIR ARROWS TO PICK OFF ENEMIES BEFORE THEY REACH YOUR GATE!

Sticky Situations

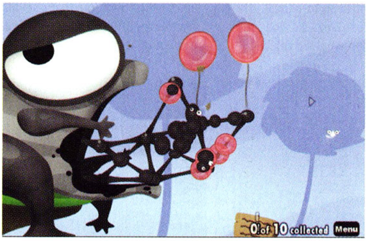
Malleable balls meet a robust physics system in the unique WiiWare puzzler World of Goo.

If you build it, they will come. Or, rather, they will escape. That's the goal in World of Goo: to build constructs out of living balls of goo, thus allowing the remaining goo balls to make their getaway, usually via a pipe. The simple but unusual puzzle game comes from fledgling studio 2D Boy—consisting of Electronic Arts vets Ron Carmel and Kyle Gabler—who found WiiWare to be an ideal outlet for publishing their titles without the assistance of a large company. The resultant independence has allowed 2D Boy to make something outside the norm yet still totally accessible; to manipulate the goo, you need only point, click, and drag using the Wii remote.

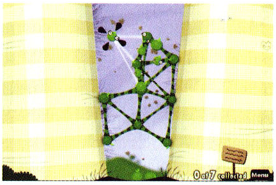
At the game's most basic, you'll stretch the goo balls to form a series of triangular shapes to create, for example, a tower that leads to the level's exit, but the game gains complexity quickly. Hazards like blades and spikes threaten your friendly goo balls, or you might have to build oddly shaped structures that conform to a stage's unusual geometry. There are different types of goo, too. "Some balls are prettier than other balls, some are made out of water, some can stick to almost anything, some can catch on fire and become contagious, some explode, some are already dead, some only dangle, others aren't even balls at all," says Gabler. "But no matter what species, they are all very curious and just want to explore."



It's all held together by a realistic physics engine, so be careful how you build; if you try to create a bridge without proper support, for example, or a tower with a weak foundation, the whole thing will come tumbling down. World of Goo features both solo and co-op play (the PC Version is single-player only), plus you can compete online to build the tallest goo tower in the World of Goo Corporation mode. Although the game's release date isn't set, 2D Boy hopes to make it available this fall. —CHRIS H.

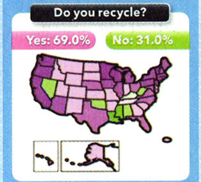


These screens are from the PC version, but World of Goo on Wii should look identical.

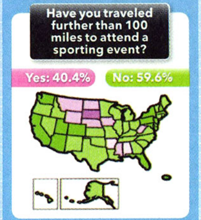


SURVEY SAYS...

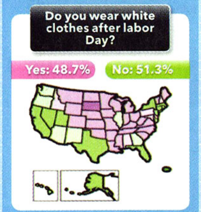
2008 is an election year, but who wants to worry about politics when you could be voting on something important—like how far you'd travel to go to a sporting event—on Wii's Everybody Votes Channel? The channel's results are often amusing and unpredictable.



Not everyone believes in "Waste not, want not." Remember: what happens in Vegas, stays...in a desert landfill.


Have you traveled further than 100 miles to attend a sporting event?
Yes: 40.4%
No: 59.6%

Not even great distances will stop upper midwesterners from attending live sporting events.



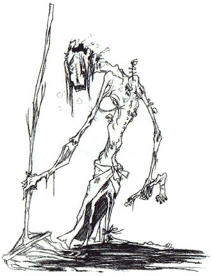
The central US refuses to give up the right to wear white, while the coastal states won't have it any other way.

Follow the Light

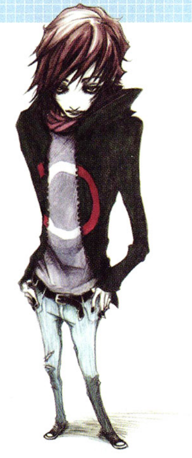
WayForward emerges from the shadows to reveal **LIT**, an original horror-puzzle WiiWare game.

Are you afraid of the dark? In LIT you will be. Developed and published by WayForward (creators of Contra 4 on DS) LIT is one of the most ambitious WiiWare games revealed thus far—a 3-D horror-puzzle game with action elements. Playing as an underachieving high-school student named Jake, it's up to you to stay in the light—and stay alive—as you try to escape your twisted school, where students and teachers have become creatures lurking in the shadows.

"Everything in the game revolves around the relationship between dark and light," says director Adam Tierney. "Walking into a dark area means death, while remaining in light is relatively safe. Jake has a very dark outlook on life, but he's forced to light his school up in order to save himself and his girlfriend, Rachael."



Unlike typical horror puzzles, LIT isn't about finding keys to open doors à la Resident Evil. "A big distinction to draw is that this is not an action game with puzzle elements," Tierny asserts. "It's a pure puzzler, where Jake progresses by spilling light in wherever he can. So he might shatter a window with his slingshot, causing a beam of light to pour in onto the floor. Jake can now safely tread on that stretch of floor. Turning on lamps, PCs, and dropping flares are a few more ways in which Jake can introduce light into the room. Boss battles are a little more actiony, but still adhere to the same lighting mechanics as the straight puzzles rooms."



This is Jake. He'll look more human in the game. His foes will still look totally freaky.

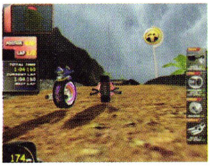
WayForward isn't ready to fully reveal how the game will control, but LIT will involve using the Wii remote to interact with light sources and perform actions, such as aiming, throwing, and recharging your flashlight. You'll also lift the remote to answer phone calls from Rachael, which emit from the remote's speaker.

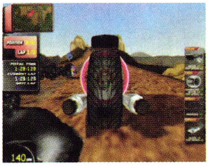
Although LIT doesn't yet have a release date, we're eager to hear and see more on this promising project as it gets closer to completion. —CHRIS H.

Wheel Warriors

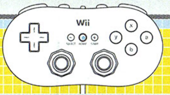
Crashing is racing in WiiWare's first racing game, **SPOGS Racing**.

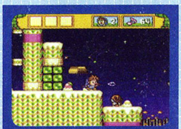
SPOGS Racing gives you pretty much everything you'd expect from a racing game: Quick Play, Season, and head-to-head Battle modes across 12 tracks. You drive a mono-wheeled vehicle with a customizable picture in it (the game gives you 25 pictures to choose from; sadly, you can't upload your own), but that's not all that makes SPOGS Racing different from other racers. The central idea of the game is "Crash 'N Grab": crash into another racer and grab one of four upgrades—engines, tires, brakes, or exhausts—to improve your SPOG. Other racers are trying to crash into you, though, so you'll need to gather power-ups such as shields and water cannons.





Developer D2C's goal was to make SPOGS Racing accessible to everyone, so although it does support motion-controlled steering, that's considered an advanced control style. After playing with both it and the default control scheme, we're inclined to agree: it's easier to stay in the middle of the track—thus avoiding potential spinouts—by steering with the Control Pad. —JUSTIN C.

VIRTUAL  CONSOLE



DOREMI FANTASY: MILON'S DOKIDOKI ADVENTURE

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**

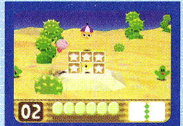
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**

GENRE: **PLATFORMER**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1996**

WHAT Hop and bubble-blast your way through colorful sidescrolling levels in this 16-bit import.

WHY Platformers are a rare breed these days; it's a treat to play one that never previously saw the light of day stateside. Be warned though—there's a good amount of Japanese text to struggle with. —CH



KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 64**

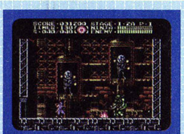
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**

GENRE: **PLATFORMER**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: **2000**

WHAT As the cuddly Kirby, you inhale baddies and steal their powers in this 2.5-D platformer.

WHY Sure, some people may be turned off by the easy difficulty level and general childishness of the Kirby universe, but the platforming is fun, and combining powers gives the game a good amount of variety. —JC



NINJA GAIDEN III: THE ANCIENT SHIP OF DOOM

PLATFORM: **NES**

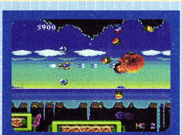
PUBLISHER: **TECMO**

GENRE: **ACTION**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1991**

WHAT The third chapter of Ryu Hayabusa's groundbreaking saga pits him against technologically enhanced foes. Series fans will appreciate the new power-ups and added techniques (such as maneuvering on the ceiling).

WHY Ninja Gaiden III isn't as good as its predecessors, but it's still a solid, if infuriatingly difficult, action game. —CH



PSYCHOSIS

PLATFORM: **TURBOGRAFX-16**

PUBLISHER: **NAXAT/NEC**

GENRE: **SHOOTER**

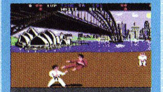
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1990**

WHAT Yet another shooter for the TurboGrafx. This one is definitely on the weird side; you might wonder if you're suffering from the game's titular disorder when you see some of these enemies.

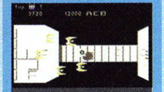
WHY If you like your shooters creepy, Psychosis definitely delivers. Otherwise, there are lots of vastly superior choices to be found on Virtual Console. —ST

THE OTHER 64 COMES TO VC

Yet one more classic system is joining the Virtual Console lineup—at least in Europe. Nintendo's European branch recently announced that games for the Commodore 64 will be available for download later this year. Among the initial offerings will be fighting game International Karate and sci-fi shooter Uridium, at the cost of 500 points each. As of press time, there are no plans to bring Commodore 64 games to North America.



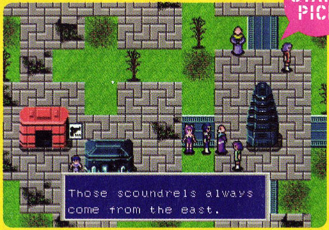
INTERNATIONAL KARATE



URIDIUM

VIRTUAL CONSOLE SPOTLIGHT

STAFF PICK



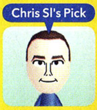
Those scoundrels always come from the east.

PHANTASY STAR II

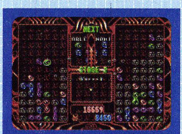
PLATFORM: **SEGA GENESIS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**

GENRE: **RPG** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1989**

Chris Sl's Pick



In this sequel to what was perhaps the Sega Master System's single enduring classic, you journey across the Algo star system in an adventure that begins when the player is sent to investigate a malfunctioning computer called Mother Brain (no, not *that* Mother Brain). While the old-school approach to a turn-based RPG might seem a little simplistic next to today's role-playing games, it's well worth a look for Phantasy Star fans who only know the series for its more recent online multiplayer-focused entries.



PUYO PUYO 2: TSUU

PLATFORM: **SEGA GENESIS**

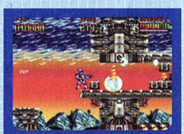
PUBLISHER: **SEGA/COMPILE**

GENRE: **PUZZLE**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1994**

WHAT In the previously Japanese-only sequel to puzzle game Puyo Puyo, you match up four Puyos of the same color to clear them, trying to combo as often as possible to defeat your opponent.

WHY This is pretty much more of the same, so it's only really worth buying if you haven't played Puyo Puyo before. While it's fun, be warned that the text is almost entirely in Japanese. —JC



SUPER TURRICAN

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**

PUBLISHER: **FACTOR 5/SEIKA**

GENRE: **ACTION**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1993**

WHAT A scrolling sci-fi action/platformer featuring cool weapons, precision control, and nice graphics, ST was developed by Factor 5, who went on to create the Rogue Squadron games.

WHY Freedom to roam, freedom to blast aliens, freedom to get blasted by aliens and start all over again. —SP

WANTED!

What classic games do you want to see come to Virtual Console? Send us up to five picks (only for systems currently represented on Virtual Console) at **vcpoll@futureus.com.** We'll print the results in an upcoming issue. Note: This is for polling purposes only, and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

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Seventh Heaven

>METAL SLUG 7

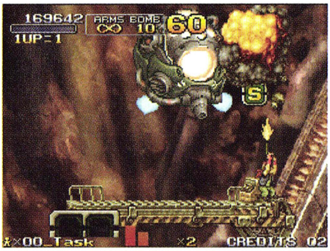
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SNK PLAYMORE**
DEVELOPER: **SNK PLAYMORE** • RELEASE: **Q4 2008**

SNK's long-running Metal Slug franchise is making the jump from arcade quarter-muncher to DS original, but don't think for a second that the series is straying from its hardcore run-and-gun 2-D roots just because it's gone portable.

Fans of the coin-op Metal Slug games (all of which are compiled in Metal Slug Anthology for Wii) will feel right at home with Metal Slug 7. You can choose from six returning heroes—Tarma, Marco, Eri, Fio, or Ikari Warriors/King of Fighters vets Ralf and Clark—then charge into battle with guns blazing against the seemingly endless enemy forces. The advancing army is vast—there can be dozens of foes onscreen at once, not to mention tanks, helicopters, and other tools of destruction—but as always, there are plentiful power-ups to aid you in your mission, including heavy machine guns, rocket launchers, shotguns, flamethrowers, swords, and new weapons such as an electricity gun. As in Metal Slug 6, you can carry two weapons at once, and the more foes you defeat, the faster your score multiplier rises. Naturally, the controllable Metal Slug vehicles are back as well, including new models such as a rail car.

While some portable Metal Slug games have taken minor liberties with the series formula, our time with MS7 indicates an authentic arcade-style experience that takes you through seven stages of horizontally and vertically scrolling terrain. The treacherous levels range from frosty snowfields to decaying fortresses to a massive cliff with flowing waterfalls. Each stage culminates in a challenging battle against a screen-filling boss; one of the most impressive boss encounters is against a scorpion-shaped robot that can split into two parts.

Unfortunately, MS7 is missing the co-op play the series is known for, but the game makes up for it in part, at least, by taking advantage of the DS hardware. A scalable map on the touch screen lets you see the locations of weapons, vehicles, bonus items, and those elusive hobo-like POWs. The game also features three difficulty settings and a combat training mode to help you perfect your skills. Metal Slug 7 isn't scheduled for a North American release for several months, but even in its unfinished form, MS7 looks like it should be well worth the wait for fans of nonstop shoot-'em-up action. —CHRIS H.



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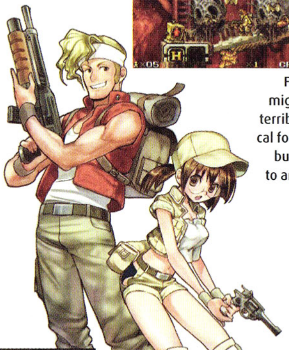
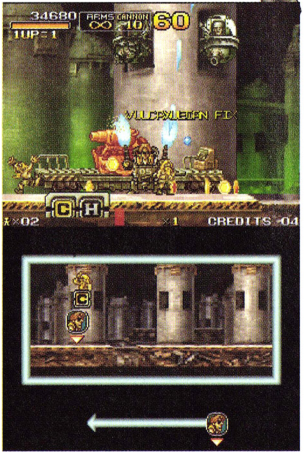


Fio's attire might not be terribly practical for combat, but it's hard to argue with success.

[Below] Check out the map on the bottom screen. Now you can spot POWs with ease.



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CREDITS 04

100511
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1UP=2
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CREDITS 03

Get on Board

> Wii FIT

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

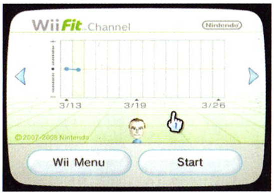
This month we received our very own copy of Wii Fit with the Balance Board, and we've been sweating with our Miis ever since (note to industry folks: now probably isn't the most pleasant time to drop by). We had tried Nintendo's genre-busting exercise package before at various events, but its true appeal can't be appreciated until you settle into a daily regimen. Can an office full of game-playing couch potatoes get on board with Wii's most active experience yet? So far, the answer is a surprising "yes."

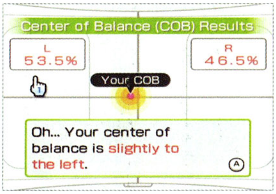
The beauty of Wii Fit is that—unlike diet and workout fads that come and go—it doesn't push any single routine on you. The package is simply a set of tools that are there to be used in whatever configuration and frequency you think will get the results you're looking for. You are encouraged to contribute at least a small amount of exercise on a regular basis, and even a quick few minutes of minigames are rewarded with updated progress reports and credits toward earning new games and workouts. Even a slouch like me finds it hard to resist getting off my butt when I'm tempted with video-game-type goals such as topping high scores and unlocking hidden games.

If you're looking to shape up, you can set your weight loss goal and pick from dozens of exercises to help you reach it. From torso twists to steps to doing push-ups on the Balance Board, there's enough variation to tailor your workout however you'd like. You can even jog while watching TV; the Wii remote (which you stash in your pocket or hold in your hand) measures your speed and its speaker chimes in with instructions when you aren't viewing the game screen.

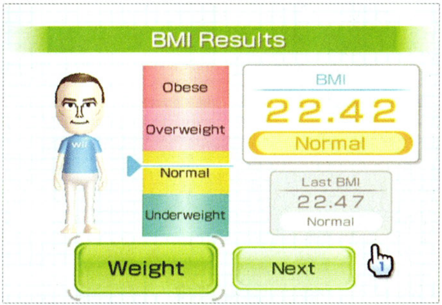
However, you don't necessarily have to "feel the burn" to enjoy Wii Fit—yoga events and minigames focus on maintaining proper balance and a healthy posture more than on breaking a sweat. Measuring balance is a key focus in Wii Fit since the Balance Board's super-accurate design can tell exactly how much weight you're putting on each leg and whether that pressure is being applied toward your toes, heels, or anywhere in between. Learning more about your body—such as your natural posture, balance, and BMI (body mass index)—is one of the most compelling aspects of Wii Fit.

As an exercise tool, Wii Fit seems fully capable. It's also the first time since Wii Sports that I've experienced something so fresh and new. Stepping onto the Balance Board for the first time is a real treat, and you'll quickly find yourself having "just one more go" with the most addictive games. Wii Fit seems guaranteed to provide the next big mass-market Wii event; count on your nongaming friends and family to ask you about this one leading up to its May 19th release. —CHRIS SL.

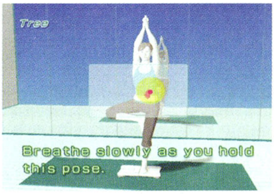




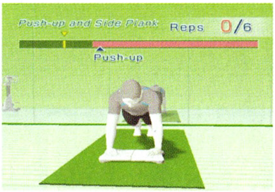
Oh... Your center of balance is slightly to the left.

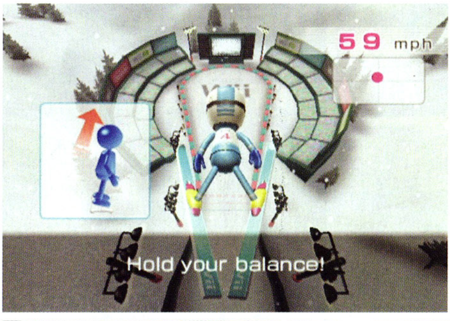


The genius of Wii Fit is that its exercises and games are all tied together with ongoing goal setting and progress reports. You can even install a Wii Fit channel for a quick daily weigh in.



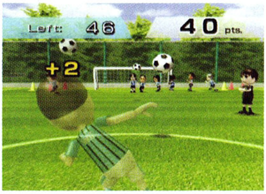
Breathe slowly as you hold this pose.





Hold your balance!

Whether ski-jumping, jogging, or fielding headers, aerobics exercises and minigames look and feel a lot like Wii Sports events. Playing them however, is a more active experience.

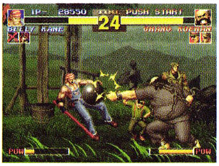


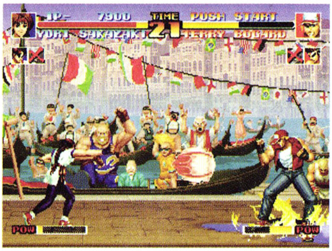
The Royal Treatment

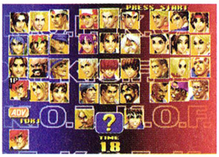
> THE KING OF FIGHTERS COLLECTION: THE OROCHI SAGA

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **SNK PLAYMORE**
DEVELOPER: **SNK PLAYMORE** • RELEASE: **Q4 2008**

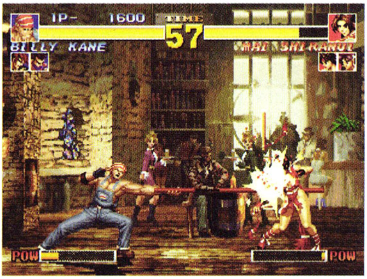
With five games collected in one, The King of Fighters Collection: The Orochi Saga may be one of the best deals around. King of Fighters '94, '95, '96, '97, and '98—still some of the best-loved games in the franchise among longtime fans—are included here, along with some extras to keep you coming back for more. You can test your mettle in the Challenge mode, where each match has certain conditions to meet, such as being able to damage the enemy only with a four-hit combo. It's good training, and should help you when facing off against the series' infamously cheap boss, Rugal. Also helpful is the fact that the game supports four different control schemes: Wii remote alone, Wii remote and nunchuk, Classic controller, and GameCube controller. If you're a fan of the franchise, you probably already have this game preordered. And if you're not yet a fan, KoF Collection is packed with so much goodness that it may make you one. —**JUSTIN C.**


1P- 28550
PUSH START
24
BILLY KANE
POW
POW

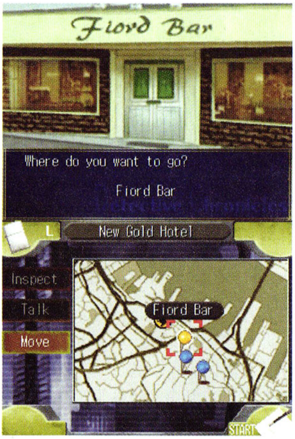

1P- 7900
TIME
PUSH START
YURI SAKAZAKI
21
TERRY BOGARD
POW
POW


PRESS START
ADV
K.O.F.
?
TIME
18

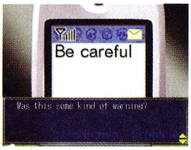
While it may be difficult to differentiate between the five games just by looking at these screenshots, all of the King of Fighters have tweaked rosters, graphics, and gameplay. [Above] Terry Bogard is as rad as ever.


1P- 1600
TIME
57
BILLY KANE
MAI SHIRANUI
POW
POW

46
GEESE HOWARD


Fiord Bar
L
New Gold Hotel
Inspect
Talk
Move
Fiord Bar
START

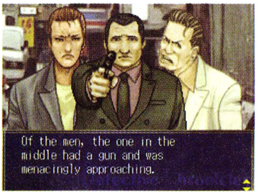
Where do you want to go?
Fiord Bar



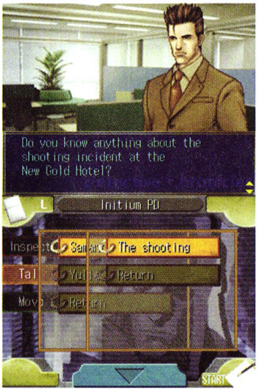
Be careful

Was this some kind of warning?

When even your cell phone starts telling you to be careful, you know big trouble is brewing.



Of the men, the one in the middle had a gun and was menacingly approaching.


L
Initium PD
Inspect
Talk
Move
The shooting
Return
Return
START

Do you know anything about the shooting incident at the New Gold Hotel?

Scenes of the Crime

> JAKE HUNTER: DETECTIVE CHRONICLES

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **WORKJAM** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

Jake Hunter is a man's man. He's got a square jaw, a steely gaze, and a keen fashion sense; there's nothing he likes better after a hard day's work than a cigarette, even though he knows it's going to kill him. Jake's also a one-man detective agency, and obviously the star of Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles. Even though Jake's a tough dude, his penetrating mind is his most important asset. As you play through three cases, it's up to you to observe suspects, investigate crime scenes, talk to witnesses, and collect evidence in order to catch criminals. You can control the game with either the touch screen or the Control Pad and buttons, but the interface is primarily text-based; this mystery-adventure is as old-school as it is serious. Though the story and characters are the game's main focus, there are unique gameplay aspects as well, such as menu-based fisticuffs and hidden passwords that unlock bonus content. —**CHRIS H.**

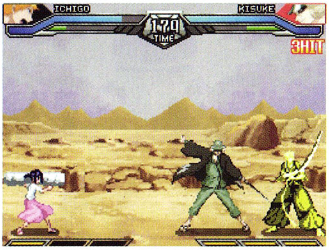
Extra Bleach

>BLEACH: DARK SOULS

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **TREASURE** • RELEASE: **SUMMER 2008**

One of the more successfully executed fighting games for the DS last year, Bleach: Blade of Fate, is giving way to a sequel that will embellish the anime-inspired story but retain the same solid play mechanics. Like its predecessor, Bleach: Dark Souls allows up to four players to fight on two planes, using button- or touch screen-triggered special moves and an expanded set of stat-enhancing Spirit Cards. The game's 44 playable characters (up from 28 in Blade of Fate) include the mask-wearing spirits known as Hollows, and Soul Reaper Ichigo Kurosaki. His quest to save Rukia Kuchiki is the focus of the storyline, which takes place between the first two seasons of the Cartoon Network show. As before, voice actors from the show's English-language translation provide the grunts and groans, plus a new Bleach encyclopedia helps you fill out your knowledge of the game's world. Local-wireless multiplayer action includes single-card download play, and the battles continue online with the support of Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. —**GEORGE S.**

Ichigo and his friends have to save Rukia from the Soul Society, which means there will be lots of fights.


ICHIGO
KISUKE
179
TIME
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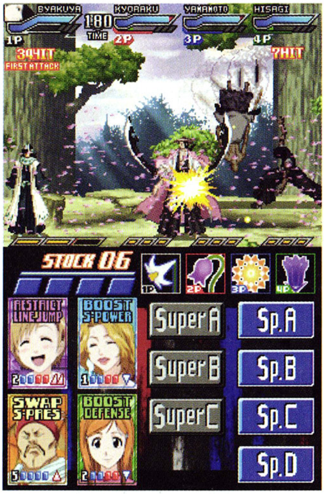
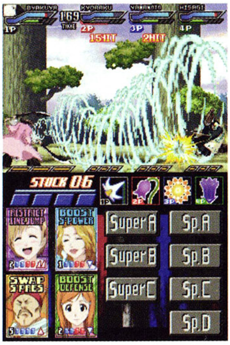
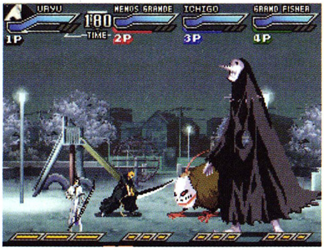
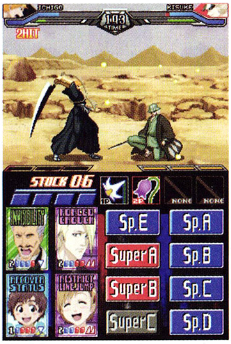

BYAKUYA
KYORAKU
YAMAMOTO
HISAGI
180
TIME
1P
2P
3P
4P
34HIT
FIRST ATTACK
7HIT
STOCK 06
RESTRICT LINE JUMP
BOOST S-POWER
SWAP S-PRES
BOOST DEFENSE
Super A
Super B
Super C
Sp.A
Sp.B
Sp.C
Sp.D


BYAKUYA
KYORAKU
YAMAMOTO
HISAGI
169
TIME
15HIT
2HIT
STOCK 06
RESTRICT LINE JUMP
BOOST S-POWER
SWAP S-PRES
BOOST DEFENSE
Super A
Super B
Super C
Sp.A
Sp.B
Sp.C
Sp.D

You have even more stat-changing Spirit Cards at your disposal. Can you identify each character?


URYU
MENOS GRANDE
ICHIGO
GRAND FISHER
180
TIME
1P
2P
3P
4P


ICHIGO
KISUKE
103
TIME
2HIT
STOCK 06
NONE
NONE
RECOVER STATUS
RESTRICT LINE JUMP
Sp.E
Super A
Super B
Super C
Sp.A
Sp.B
Sp.C
Sp.D

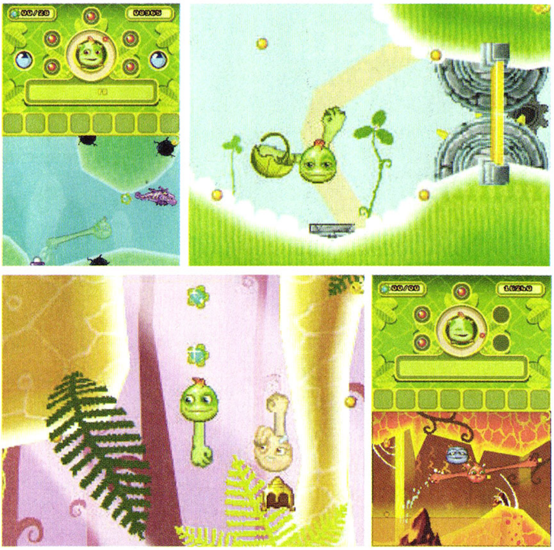
Check the encyclopedia to keep track of all of the 44 characters.

Mucking It Up

> MISTER SLIME

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SOUTHPEAK**
DEVELOPER: **LEXIS NUMÉRIQUE** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

The DS continues parading out experimental gameplay mechanics, this time in quirky adventure game Mister Slime. You control a darling little ball of goo named Slimy, who is capable of stretching himself out to amazing lengths. Mister Slime moves around by grabbing onto little pegs called anchors. He can stretch in only so many directions, so it's up to you to control grabbing anchors in front of him and letting go of the ones behind him. To latch on to an anchor, you simply touch the screen—if Slimy is close enough, he'll grab it. And if you have him let go of all the anchors, you can blow into the microphone to make him float into the air. Of course, Slimy can't go just anywhere; monsters that hurt him, try to shake his hands free of the anchors, or fire projectiles at him are all over the place, so you have to be both quick and calculating to survive. —**CHRIS SH.**



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Wii

Play as Speed Racer and your other favorite drivers from the new movie. Race at amazing speeds and use Car – Fu to flip, spin, and twist your way to victory! Compatible with the Wii wheel.

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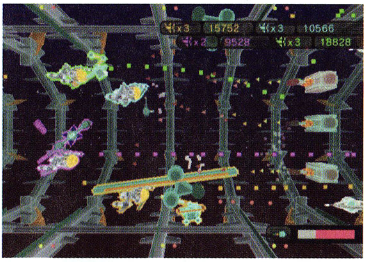
(s08)

Stick and Move

>BLAST WORKS: BUILD, TRADE, DESTROY

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **BUDCAT** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

Most side-scrolling shooters are about blowing away everything in sight and leaving nothing but carnage in your wake. Blast Works turns that philosophy on its head by letting you grab defeated enemy vehicles and weapons and use them to build up your ship to gain additional defensive and offensive capabilities. Every fallen ship you touch blocks incoming projectiles, and each has unique shot patterns to augment your innate firepower; how you grab these additions is important, too, since the position they're in when you grab them will determine their angle of fire. Obtain enough junked ships, and you'll be flying a screen-filling juggernaut, but be careful; it takes only a few enemy shots to knock your creation to pieces. That's not all that sets Blast Works apart from the competition; the game also boasts four-player cooperative play (that's a lot of bullets flying around on screen at once!) and an extremely in-depth level editor that allows you to create custom stages and send them to friends over Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. —**CHRIS H.**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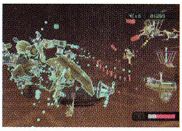
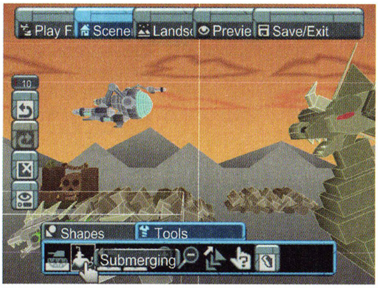
x2 9528
x3 18828



Blast Works's creation features [right and below] are very extensive.


Play F
Scene
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Save/Exit
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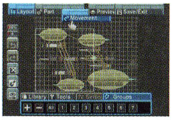
Shapes
Tools
Submerging


Layout
Part
Preview
Save/Exit
Movement
Library
Tools
Groups

RACING INTO STORES MAY 2008
VIRTUOS
SIDHE

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Mild Language
Fantasy Violence
Mild Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
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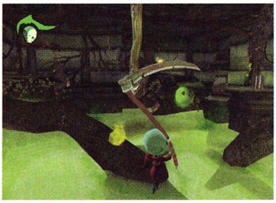
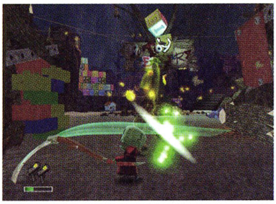
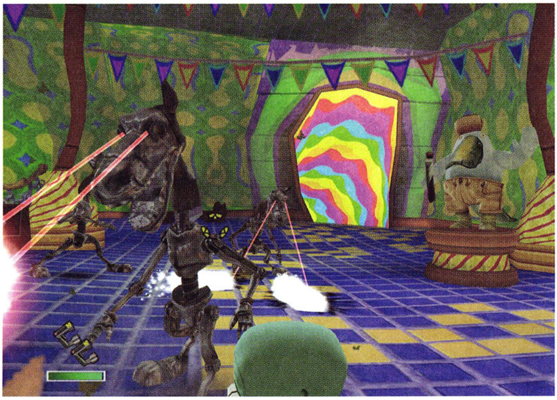






Who's Your Daddy?

> DEATH JR.: ROOT OF EVIL

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **EIDOS**
DEVELOPER: **BACKBONE** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

Death Jr., his gal pal Pandora, and their friends have a problem: a woodland nymph named Furi has kidnapped Death Jr.'s dad, the Grim Reaper, and is wreaking havoc across the world. It's up to you, as either Death Jr. or Pandora (or both if you're playing split-screen co-op with a buddy), to save the day.

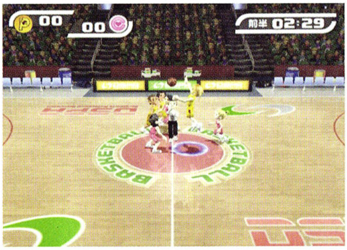
Developer Backbone has made some tweaks to enhance the Wii version of Root of Evil. The graphics look better than those on the PSP original, and Eidos tells us the overall pacing has been improved. The most notable difference is the control scheme: you press B for melee attacks and A to jump (then hold A to glide), and use the Control Pad to select weapons. There are also new camera controls: press plus and minus to rotate the camera, use C to center the camera, and hold Z while you aim with the Wii remote, then press B to shoot. The game supports motion controls outside of ranged combat, too: snap the remote upward to do an uppercut, for example. Based on what we've played, we'd say the Wii version of Root of Evil is shaping up nicely—we'll render final judgment in the upcoming review. —JUSTIN C.

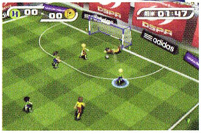
Ten Reasons to Stay Inside

> DECA SPORTS

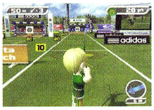
PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

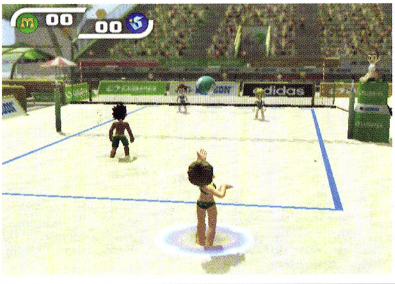
Sure, there are plenty of sports games out there for Wii, but how many of them offer curling or figure skating? Hudson's upcoming Deca Sports does, along with eight other fun activities, ranging from basketball, volleyball, and soccer to motocross and archery. The game takes a page from Wii Sports, allowing you to compete against friends in relatively simple versions of 10 different sporting events. Even its look seems inspired by Nintendo's game—the environments and menus are uncluttered, and the characters you can choose from bear a striking resemblance to Miis. However, Deca Sports's controls might be even more intuitive than those of Wii Sports, and more game modes, such as league and tournament play, could give it more replayability. Deca Sports's unique choice of events makes it stand out from the crowd of similar games on Wii, and it could be one of the best in the sports minigame genre when it is released later this spring. —TOM H.

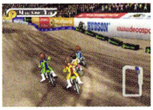


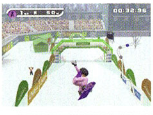


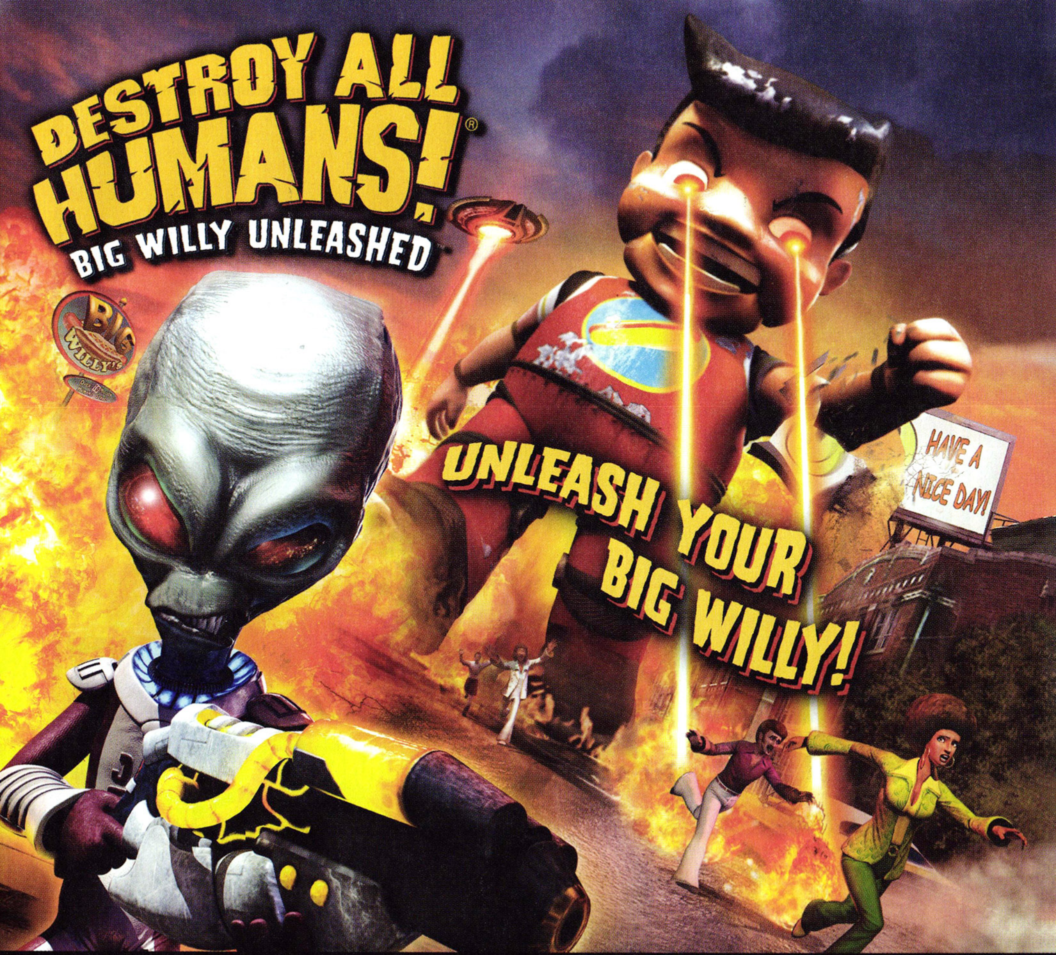
Snowboarding, volleyball, archery, and more—Deca Sports has plenty of variety.











Crypto is back to probe the world and take on the funky 70s on foot, in his UFO and behind the controls of his Big Willy mech!

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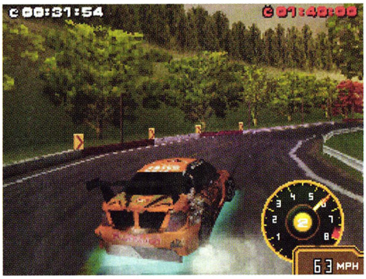
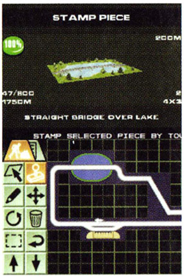
Circuit Maker

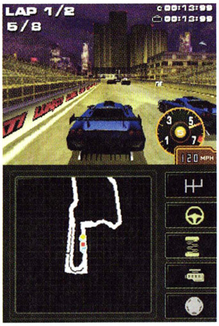
>GRID

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **CODEMASTERS**
DEVELOPER: **FIREBRAND GAMES** • RELEASE: **SUMMER 2008**

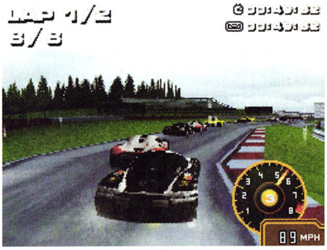
The team behind last year's solid Race Driver: Create and Race returns to the DS speedway with GRID, a similarly feature-packed arcade racer due this summer. Players will have the opportunity to compete across three continents, in events specifically tailored to each location. In Europe you'll race sports cars on some of the world's most prestigious circuits (including Spa and the Nurburgring); in the US you'll drive muscle cars through the streets of cities ranging from San Francisco to Washington D.C.; and in Japan you'll put your drift racing skills to the test on the neon-lit roadways of downtown Tokyo. A deep single-player career mode jumps back and forth between the different race types, and gives you the option of hiring an AI-controlled teammate should you struggle with a particular event (though you'll then have to share your winnings). Even more exciting is an extensive and easy-to-use track editor that lets you design your own courses—right down to the roadside billboards (try to resist the urge to draw something lewd)—then share your creations online. —**STEVE T.**







[Above right] Creating your own course is as simple as drawing it with the stylus. You can then place all sorts of trackside details, such as this lovely lake. Just try not to drive your car into it.



Mean & Green

>THE INCREDIBLE HULK

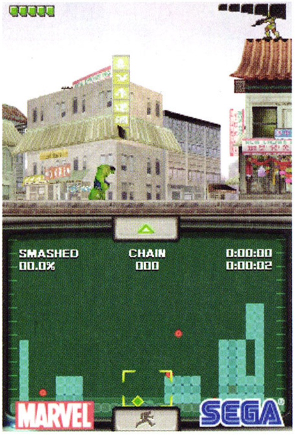
PLATFORM: **DS (ALSO ON Wii)** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **AMAZE** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2008**

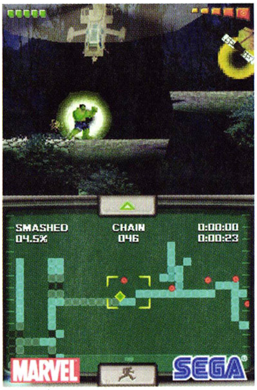
The Incredible Hulk movie hype has started to build, and with it we're finally getting fresh info about the next go-around of Hulk games. The first information from Sega is all about the DS title, a 2-D smashfest in which your goal is to destroy every building and enemy that gets in your way. The action spans 30 levels and three regions—Alaska, South America, and New York City—where Hulk will face the Abomination, a foe whose size and strength match his own. To make sure nothing will stand in his way, Hulk can tap into Rage power, giving him even more than the usual destructive force.

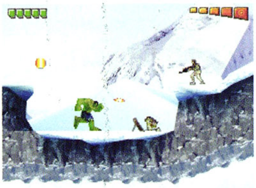
The Incredible Hulk is largely about simply crushing stuff, but the DS touch screen adds an extra dimension of exploration and adventure. Via a map on the lower screen, you can scout out the edifice locations, enemies, and, most importantly, how much damage you've caused.

The DS title will feature ad-hoc multiplayer action, where two players vie to raze as much of their surroundings as possible within a fixed amount of time; exploits in single-player mode will unlock new multiplayer characters. —**CHRIS SH.**

Blanka's back in his own game! Sorry, wrong green, shorts-wearing muscleman.







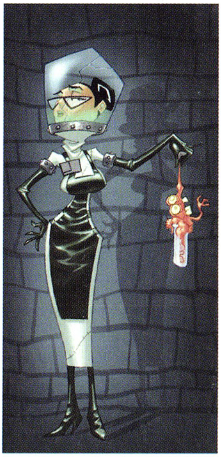
Monster Mash

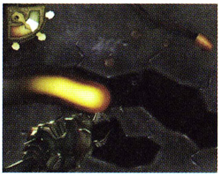
>MONSTER LAB

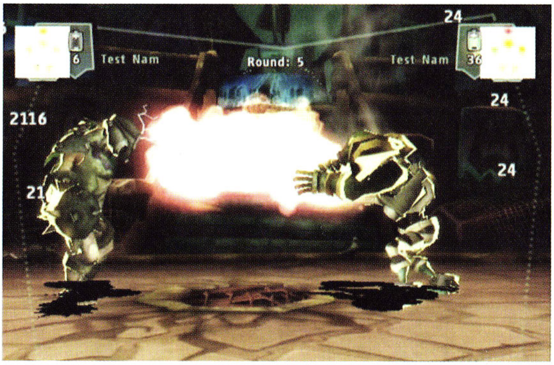
PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **EIDOS**
DEVELOPER: **BACKBONE VANCOUVER** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2008**

If you've ever wanted to create your own monster but feared the wrath of torch-bearing villagers, then Eidos and developer Backbone Entertainment have the game for you. Monster Lab gives would-be Frankensteins the opportunity to devise their own custom beasts using a huge selection of body parts, then send those creations into battle against other freaks of nature. As an apprentice for the Mad Science Alliance, you'll learn the finer aspects of monster fabrication from specialists in the biological, chemical, and mechanical fields in exchange for completing missions and ultimately putting a stop to the diabolical plans of crazed genius Baron von Marty.

To construct a monster, you'll need a head, a torso, legs, and two individual arms. Each body part has its own characteristics and attack options, and you'll be able to forge new parts from items earned in combat. Battles are turn-based, and you can either hack off an opponent's limbs to reduce its effectiveness, or go for the quick kill by targeting the torso (as far as monsters are concerned, a head is nothing more than another limb). When you're ready to prove your creature's supremacy, you can take it online to duke it out with friends. —**STEVE T.**



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Playground
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Attack
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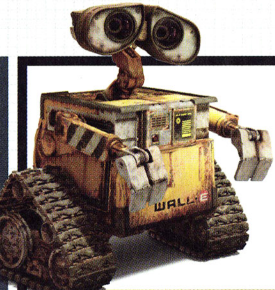
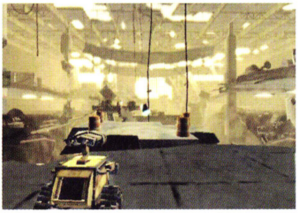
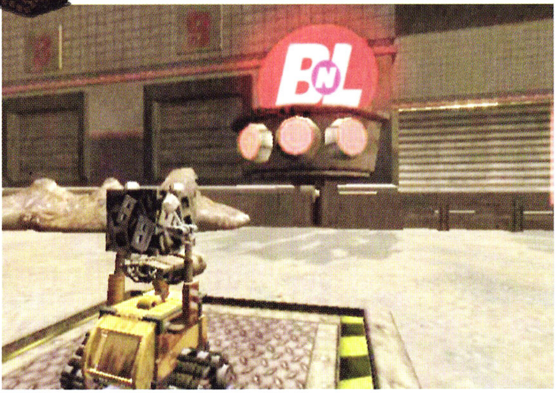






Oh, Scrap!

> WALL*E

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **HEAVY IRON** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2008**

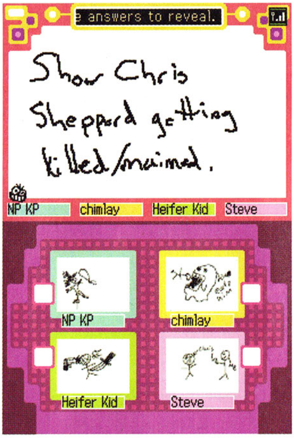
The junk-collecting title character of Pixar's summer release WALL*E, and Heavy Iron's game adaptation, may not be a classic shoot-first-ask-questions-later video game hero, but he does pack a wallop. With a swipe of the Wii remote, you instruct him to scoop up one of five types of metal-cube projectiles, then toss them by using a throwing motion with the nunchuk. The targets in an early demo are switches that activate platforms for navigation through the game's nine environments, but there are promises of enemy encounters, in which case the exploding Charge cubes will come in handy. The game also features racing elements and a Scrap match for up to four players. While participants step onto a tumbling three-sided platform, they try to hit switches to knock down barriers and collect treasure before everything goes sideways. The visuals depict a world of contraptions, conveyor belts, and spinning cylinders that should prove to be a fun playground for platforming. The sounds help bring life to the environment with hydraulic hisses and electronic whirs created by *Star Wars* sound veteran Ben Burtt, who also lends his voice to the main character for both the film and the game. —**GEORGE S.**

OMGWTH?!

> LOL

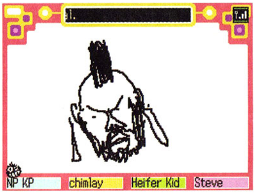
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **AGETEC**
DEVELOPER: **SKIP** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

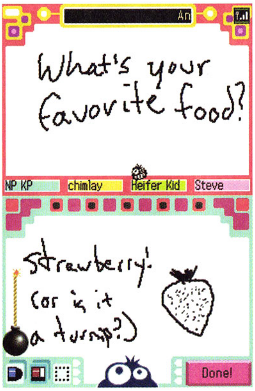
We recently had a chance to spend some hands-on time with LOL, a game that almost defies description. Imagine a competitive form of PictoChat, where one person comes up with a topic, and the rest of the participants create drawings or write messages that correspond to the theme. Then everyone votes to determine whose masterpiece is the best under whatever criteria they choose. There aren't any in-game themes that the participants must follow; the topic is entirely up to the host, as are the responses. The drawing tools are rudimentary: you have a pencil, an eraser, and a clear-all button—that's it. With these implements, the idea is, obviously, not to create some long-labored artwork; you have only a short amount of time to come up with something entertaining, so simple humor and cheap visual gags are in high demand. In fact, the open-endedness of the game seems to make a lot of room for improvisation amongst your friends. Don't look for a single-player mode; you'll need some compadres to share the downloadable single-card play to get a game going. —**CHRIS SH.**



e answers to reveal.

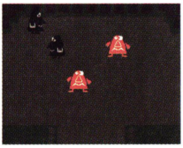
Show Chris Sheppard getting killed/maimed.





What's your favorite food?

strawberry! (or is it a turnip?)



[Left] Between rounds, you'll spend time tagging odd critters in a touch-screen minigame.

Let the Fu Fly

>KUNG FU PANDA

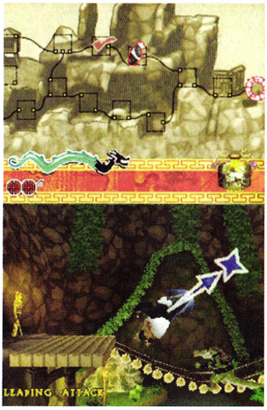
PLATFORM: **DS (ALSO ON Wii)** • PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **VICARIOUS VISIONS** • RELEASE: **MAY 2008**

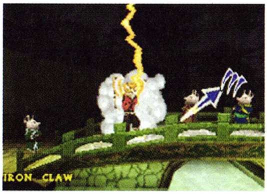
In anticipation of the animated flick *Kung Fu Panda*, we've been getting our kicks with the licensed DS game. This isn't another half-baked movie game (as we presumed it would be, mistakenly); Kung Fu Panda has more high-flying fun than the usual licensed fare.

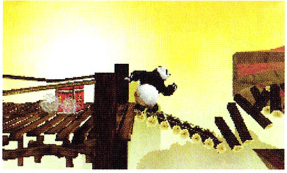
You play as stocky Po the Panda, who, by a twist of fate, becomes the only animal who can save his village from an evil snow leopard. The adventure stretches across more than a dozen worlds, where he'll learn more and more acrobatic skills from various kung-fu masters on his way to becoming a master himself. The 2-D levels feature a surprisingly tight mix of platforming, combat, and puzzle-solving.

Created by the same team at Vicarious Visions that did Spider-Man 3 last year, Kung Fu Panda uses similar controls—running, crouching, and jumping are performed via the Control Pad or buttons, while all attacks and grapples are performed via touch-screen strokes.

Look for Kung Fu Panda to arrive in stores shortly before the movie hits theaters on June 6th. —**CHRIS SH.**





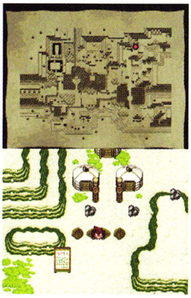


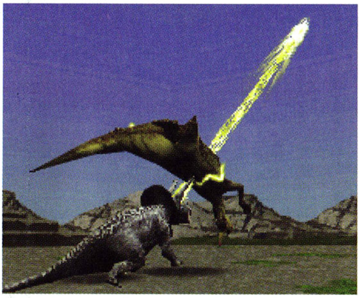
'Saur Sports

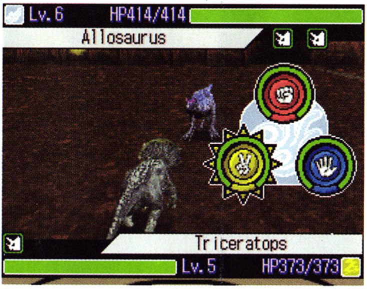
>DINOSAUR KING

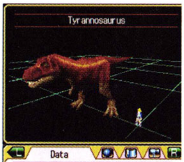
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **CLIMAX ENT.** • RELEASE: **AUGUST 2008**

Pokémon's elements are often put in terms of a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors: each one trumps another as a way to give the advantage to strategy-minded players. Other monster-collection games have used similar schemes, but none have taken the concept as literally as Sega's Dinosaur King. Rock, Paper, and Scissors are each associated with a dinosaur attack. If you pick the attack that beats the one your opponent selected, your dinosaur will deal the damage. In a hands-on demo, we learned that a two-player duel (facilitated by a local wireless session or Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection) requires you to use your wits. Every dinosaur can cause a critical hit with one of the three attacks. If you can figure out when your opponent is likely to attempt his or her biggest hit, you'll be able to launch an effective counterattack. The cartoon-adapted single-player adventure takes you to North America, Asia, Europe, Antarctica, and Africa, where you'll fight off Dr. Z's dinosaurs and dig up unique fossils in each region. Clean them up in a touch-controlled minigame, revive the dinos, and trade them with fellow players. —**GEORGE S.**







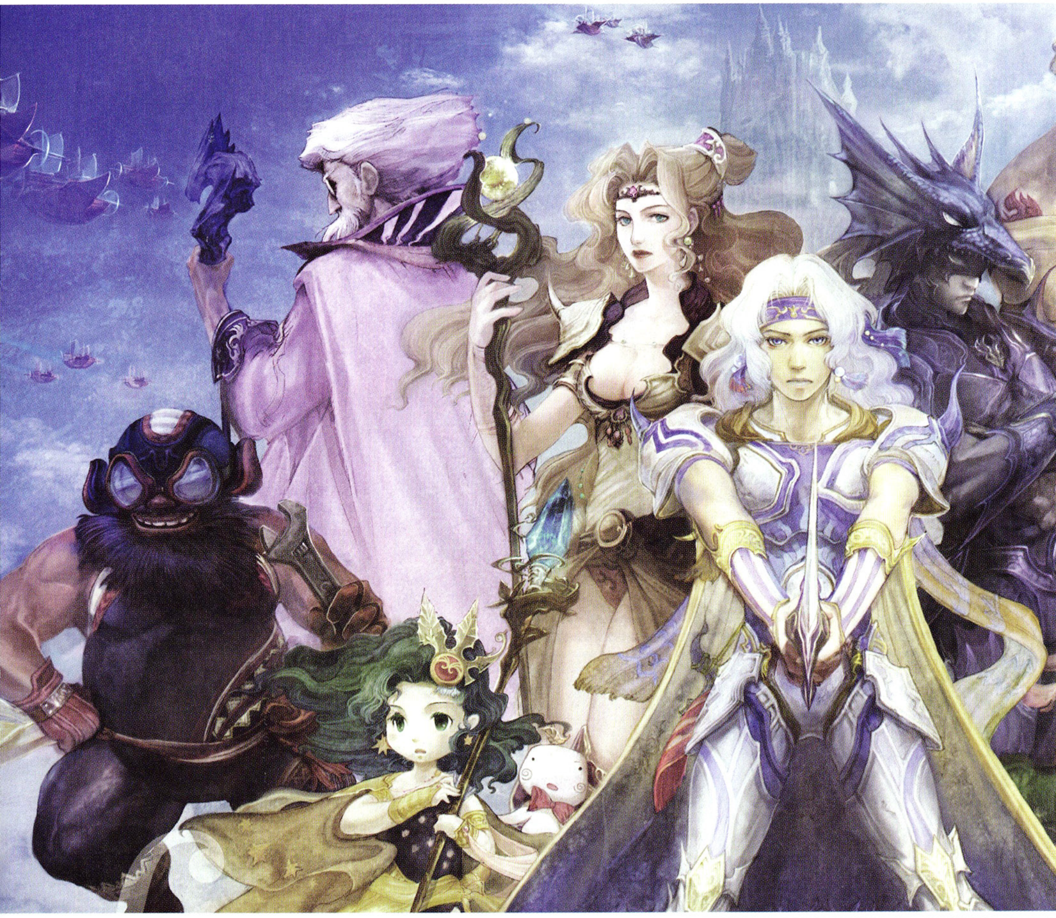


Tyrannosaurus

Meaning of Name
Tyrant Lizard

Classification
Order: Saurischia
Suborder: Theropoda
Family: Tyrannosauridae

Y Prev. X Next



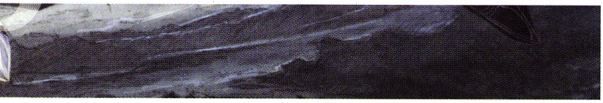
FANTASTIC

OLD-SCHOOL STORYTELLING *meets* **CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY** *in the*

BY CASEY LOE

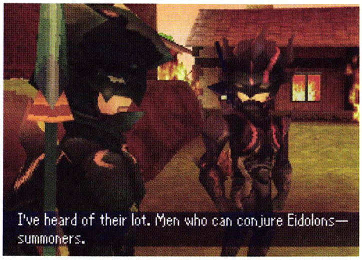
FOUR

DEFINITIVE REMAKE *of* FINAL FANTASY IV.



The release of the original Final Fantasy IV was a watershed moment in the history of role-playing games. It had the largest cast of characters and the most intricate plot of any console RPG up to that point, and its story set many a schoolyard abuzz with talk of Kain's betrayal, Palom and Porom's noble sacrifice, and—most importantly—whether Rydia was hotter than Rosa. Looking back on it now, it's almost comical; we were watching 16-pixel-by-16-pixel sprites run into each other, flash, and disappear, and interpreting it as heart-wrenching drama. It was a simpler time.

Now, 17 years later, Final Fantasy IV has been reborn in a world of polygons and visual effects. Every one of the game's event scenes has been redone with movie-style camera angles and such impressive tech as real-time shadows on the characters' adorable-yet-tormented faces. Much of the dialogue is now voiced, and voiced well, adding weight to key emotional



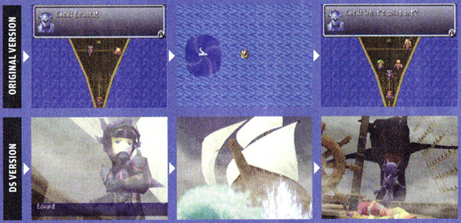
I've heard of their lot. Men who can conjure Eidolons—summoners.

Like Final Fantasy III, FFIV opens with a sprawling CG intro that spans both of the DS screens.

Kain, the original brooding hero, wears a helmet with four eyes so he can emote double the ennui. Beat that, Cloud!

OH, *the* DRAMA!

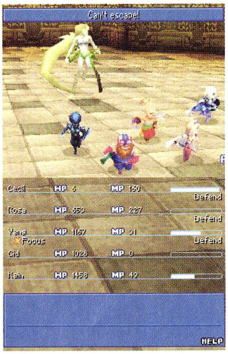
In 1991 a gallon of gas cost a nickel, young whippersnappers called their elders "sir" and "ma'am," and video game events consisted of flat pictures called "sprites" jittering around and bumping into each other. This was considered riveting drama, and we liked it that way! But perhaps there is something to be said for the way the Nintendo DS's 3D environments bring the same scenes to life.



scenes. But outside of some new scenes that flesh out the villainous Golbez, the story still follows the original's fast-moving, earnest, and at times endearingly goofy narrative almost word for word. "Adding 3-D graphics, voices, and other details to a remake of an older title was difficult. No matter what you choose, you know that it is going to be different from what some fans of the original had envisioned," explains executive producer and director Takashi Tokita, the Square Enix veteran who also helmed the Super Nintendo version of Final Fantasy IV. "So we concentrated on trying to bring our original vision to life using the modern tools we now have to work with."

While the remake resembles 2006's DS version of Final Fantasy III, the developers at Square Enix and Matrix have trumped their previous release in almost every possible way. "From the very beginning, we were thinking of the aspects of Final Fantasy III that we wanted to improve," explains

[Left] Rydia has received some dramatic enhancements.



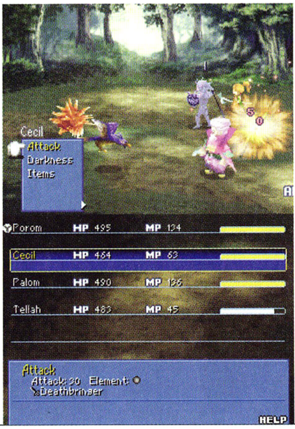
Can't escape!

Cecil HP 6 MP 160 Defend
Rosa HP 653 MP 227 Defend
Yang HP 1167 MP 31 Defend
Focus
Cid HP 1028 MP 0
Kain HP 1458 MP 49

HELP

You're a good man, Cecil.

[Above] But Rosa, he has the word "dark" right in his job occupation!



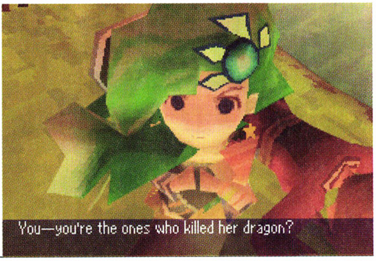
Cecil
Attack
Darkness
Items

Porom HP 495 MP 134
Cecil HP 464 MP 63
Palom HP 490 MP 136
Tellah HP 483 MP 45

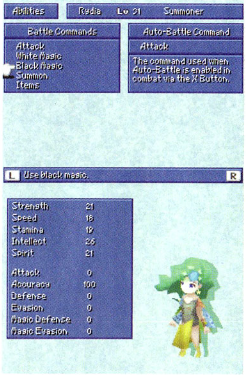
Attack
Attack: 30 Element:
Deathbringer

HELP

[Left] The lower screen provides all the data on character status, turn order, and even weapon statistics, keeping the upper screen free of clutter.



You—you're the ones who killed her dragon?



Abilities

Rydia Lv 31 Summoner

Battle Commands

Attack
White Magic
Black Magic
Summon
Items

Auto-Battle Command

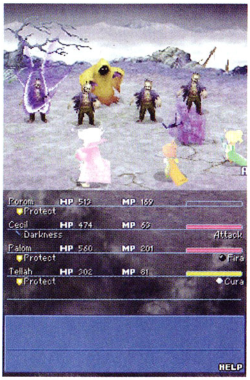
Attack

The command used when Auto-Battle is enabled in combat via the X Button.

L Use black magic. R

Strength	21
Speed	18
Stamina	19
Intellect	26
Spirit	21
Attack	0
Accuracy	100
Defense	0
Evasion	0
Magic Defense	0
Magic Evasion	0

[Below] Upgrades to the Final Fantasy III engine allow for much larger enemy party sizes. Lucky you!



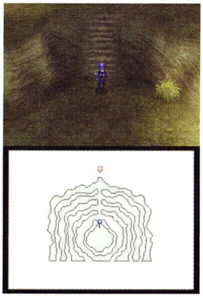
Porom HP 513 MP 169
Protect

Cecil HP 474 MP 63
Darkness Attack

Palom HP 560 MP 201
Protect Fira

Tellah HP 302 MP 81
Protect Cura

[Right] Whenever you fill in 100% of a dungeon map, you'll win a prize.



Tomoya Asano, producer of both DS remakes, ticking off a list of criticisms that fans made of their previous release. His team has successfully addressed them all: The battles no longer require lengthy loading times despite the more detailed characters, wider array of abilities, and elaborate summoning sequences. And even with all the graphical upgrades, the battle system can now support larger parties on both sides of the battlefield. Finally, the second screen of the DS has now been put to much better use, providing information about enemies, weapons, and status conditions in battle, and a detailed automap that gradually reveals itself as you explore each dungeon area.

If there's one hurdle that could pose a challenge for this DS release, it's the fact that Final Fantasy IV had a well-received remake on the Game Boy Advance less than three years ago. But according to Asano, the DS remake was made with the players of that version very much in mind. "I think having already played the game, be it the original Super NES version or the GBA release, will only make players appreciate the DS version more, seeing what current technology has allowed us to do with the game." And this version has more than just visual upgrades to offer—sweeping gameplay changes and a significant difficulty boost should keep even the most experienced FFIV veterans on their toes.

THE SKILLS THAT EARN THE GILS

The first change that the old-timers will notice is a total overhaul of the weaker character abilities from previous versions; Porom's Cry now lowers enemy defenses, a far more useful ability than just making it easier to run away. Rosa's Pray ability now restores MP as well as HP, and her prayers are answered more often that not. Nearly all of Edward's abilities have been upgraded, finally transforming him from a laughingstock into a truly potent warrior. But the rebalancing of

Porom

CHOKE ON POROM'S BITTER TEARS

Crying didn't accomplish much in previous versions of FFIV—it upped your chances of fleeing successfully, but wasted a turn that could have been better spent actually attempting to run away. This most useless of abilities has been completely overhauled, and Porom's tears now inflict a physical-defense reduction on all enemies on the battlefield, including bosses. Weep for joy, Porom fans—she is so much better now!

underpowered moves is only the first of several major twists to the game's ability system.

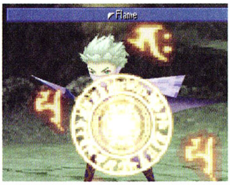
The abilities unique to each hero in the original Final Fantasy IV served the purpose of differentiating the characters, but left players with no way to make the party or characters their own. The developers of the Game Boy Advance remake attempted to remedy that by allowing players to select their own party for the game's final dungeon, but Asano was never satisfied with that solution. "Being able to change your party members in the GBA version was fun, but in terms of the story, we really thought it was best that you enter the final dungeon with those five. And moreover, you could really only enjoy the benefits of the GBA version's party-changing system at the very end of the game," he explains. "We wanted to give players a way to have that experience from the early stages of the game, and that's where the idea for augments came from."

Augments are key items that allow a character of your choice to permanently learn a new ability. The original idea was that when characters would leave the party for storyline reasons, they would drop an augment for one of their trademark abilities, allowing players to preserve their favorite strategies and combos with a new party. The prospect of Edge and Yang teaming up to cast Twinspell and Cid yodeling out a Bardsong performance is sweet enough, but surprisingly,

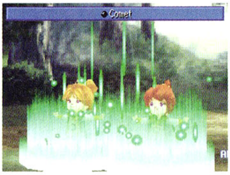
Yang's Wife

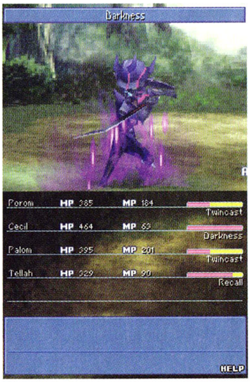
Yang! Oh, you're all right!

Chocobo Kick

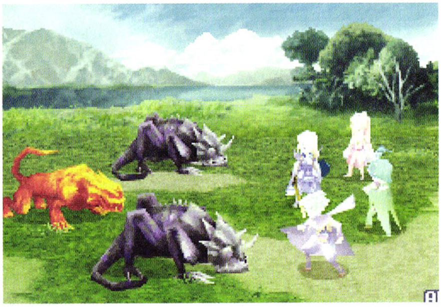


While many abilities have changed, Edge's Ninjutsu and Palom & Porom's Twincast are as powerful as ever.

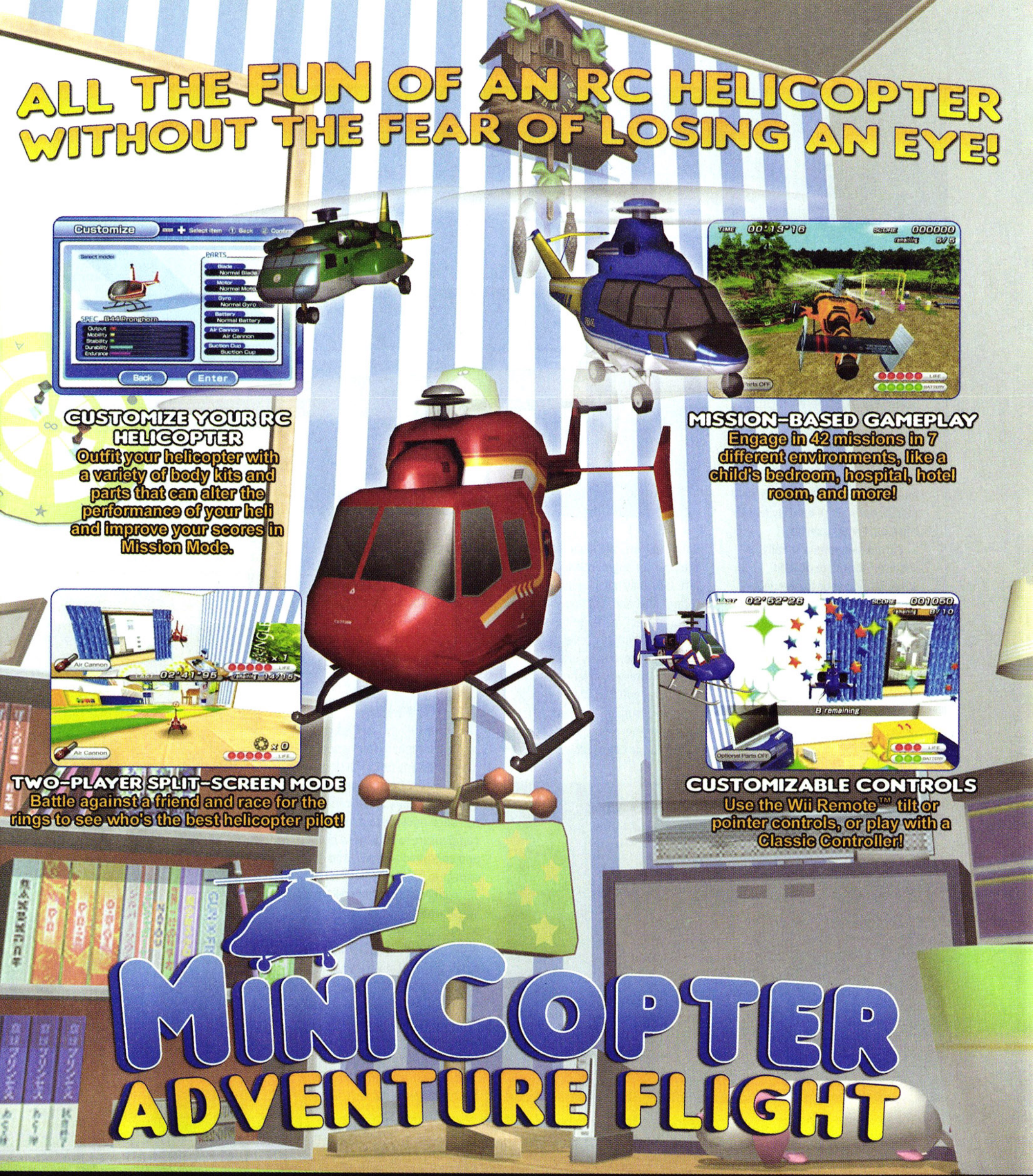




Porom	HP 385	MP 184	Twincast
Cecil	HP 464	MP 63	Darkness
Palom	HP 395	MP 201	Twincast
Tellah	HP 329	MP 90	Recall



[Above] As in the SNES original, the DS version of Final Fantasy IV doesn't allow you to change your party at will. You'll have to devise new tactics each time your roster changes.


ALL THE FUN OF AN RC HELICOPTER WITHOUT THE FEAR OF LOSING AN EYE!
Customize
Select item
Back
Confirm
PARTS
Blade
Normal Blade
Motor
Normal Motor
Gyro
Normal Gyro
Battery
Normal Battery
Air Cannon
Air Cannon
Suction Cup
Suction Cup
SPEC B44 Pronghorn
Output
Mobility
Stability
Durability
Endurance
Back
Enter
TIME 00'13"16
SCORE 000000
LIFE
BATTERY
Air Cannon
02'41"95
LIFE
Air Cannon
02'52"26
SCORE 001050
8 remaining
Optional Parts OFF
LIFE
BATTERY
MINICOPTER
ADVENTURE FLIGHT

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Outfit your helicopter with a variety of body kits and parts that can alter the performance of your heli and improve your scores in Mission Mode.

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Battle against a friend and race for the rings to see who's the best helicopter pilot!

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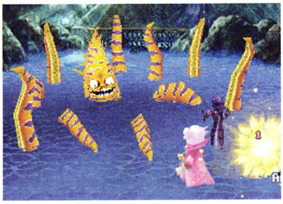
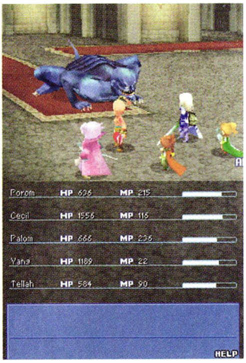


[Above] Shifting to a behind-the-party camera angle only adds to the tension of FFIV's tough boss fights.

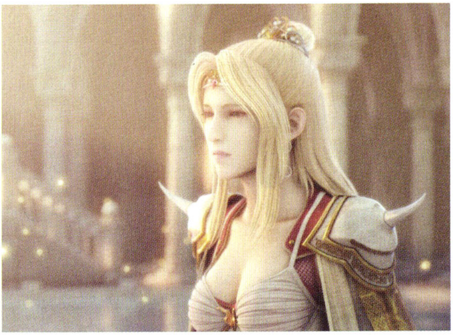


Edward
That's no ordinary foe!

The ring!

the transfer of existing abilities turned out to be merely the tip of the augment iceberg. There are nearly 40 augments in all, and the majority are abilities that have never before been available to any party character in Final Fantasy IV. In fact, several are entirely new to the Final Fantasy series.

Earning augments usually requires players to do a bit of backtracking or to pursue storyline subplots. Remember that scene where Edward battles a foe solo with the help of Anna's ghost? Return to the site of the battle the next day, and you'll get the Item Lore augment, which doubles the efficacy of items used in combat. When Yang's wife bids him farewell after the Fabul Castle battles, she'll hand over the Counter augment as a parting gift. (She may have intended it for her husband, but you should give it to Cecil instead—it combos beautifully with his Cover ability.) And if you thoroughly explore the Old Waterway after defeating Cagnazzo, you'll find the jaw-dropping Tsunami augment. That allows any hero who can muster 50 MP to use Cagnazzo's signature finishing move, sweeping the battlefield with a tidal wave that can deal heavy damage to any foe it doesn't kill outright. I can't tell you how good it feels to be on the right side of that move for the first time in 17 years.



AN OLDER AND WILIER FFIV

The powerful new abilities granted by the augment system would have made any other version of Final Fantasy IV into a cakewalk, but the difficulty in this remake has been boosted to more than compensate for the many new and upgraded abilities. And don't expect to breeze through it by whipping out all the old tricks you learned in previous versions of the game—the developers redesigned the game's toughest battles specifically to foil series veterans. "One of the most enjoyable parts of Final Fantasy IV's boss battles has always been analyzing the patterns and coming up with strategies to overcome them. But that's old hat for players who have already played previous incarnations of the game," notes Asano. "So to bring that challenge back, we rebalanced the game's major battles and modified the strategies the enemies employ." For example, experienced players know that the Antlion's counterattacks are far

Rosa

ROSA'S PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED

Rosa hasn't had quite the upgrade that Edward had, but she has received a few improvements. When she uses her Pray ability, her prayers are answered far more often than not, and the blessing includes MP recovery for the entire party. Her Aim skill remains unaltered, but archers will appreciate one nice change—you no longer need to buy hundreds of arrows to keep Rosa stocked. A single arrow can be fired an infinite number of times, so you can finally go hog-wild with those Holy- and elemental-type arrows that were much too precious to actually use in previous versions.

Edward

EDWARD: SPOONY NO MORE!

Well, Edward will always be spoony—this is the fourth time Final Fantasy IV has been translated from scratch, and once again Tellah's famous non sequitur "You spoony bard!" has been preserved for old-time's sake. But Edward's actual spooniness quotient has fallen dramatically, as he now has some of the best abilities in the game. His lame Sing ability has been replaced with the powerful new Bardsong, which is a whole new school of spells that can inflict negative status conditions like Sleep and Confusion on your foes or positive ones like Haste and Regeneration on your party. His Heal ability used to split one potion among the entire party, but has now been replaced with the far stronger Salve, which spreads the effects of *any* recovery item across the entire party. Edward's Hide ability hasn't changed much, but it's a lot handier now that he can use it to dodge a party-killing blow, and then use Salve to revive the entire party with one Phoenix Down upon his return. Nice work, Edward—it only took you 17 years to pull it together and shed the title of "Most Useless Final Fantasy Hero."

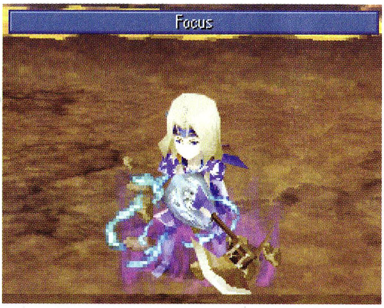
deadlier than its standard attacks, and that they should attack it with only spells and abilities. But such a simple strategy won't cut it in this version—cast spells at the wrong time, and the Antlion can now counter those too; the new trick is to watch the shifting color of its eyes, which reveal its shifting vulnerabilities. The bosses have also had their stats boosted across the board, as have many of the normal enemies, making this far and away the toughest version of Final Fantasy IV ever released. "I don't think that simply lowering the difficulty makes a game appeal to casual audiences," responds Tokita, when asked why he bucked industry trends by making his remake harder than the original. "Being challenged makes the experience rewarding. It pushes you to keep trying, and helps keep you motivated to reach the end."

Fortunately, the developers have a lifeline ready to throw to anyone who gets stuck on a particularly tough part. A new autobattle system allows you to preset a single action for each character; simply turn it on with a tap of the X Button and each character will use his preset action whenever his turn rolls around. Autobattling makes it a breeze to grind for items, money, and experience points whenever you feel you need a boost.

Unfortunately, since this version is based on the Super Nintendo original, the end-of-game Lunar Ruins dungeon from the GBA remake didn't make the cut. But those looking for a challenge above and beyond the original quest will find a few surprises after the credits roll. Subsequent playthroughs will allow players to accumulate even more augments and put them to use against several new hidden bosses.

NEXT STOP FOR THE FF REMAKE TRAIN?

When a game is remade, there's always a risk that what made it special in the first place will be destroyed—or worse yet, it will turn out there never was anything particularly remarkable under all those layers of nostalgia. But seeing Final Fantasy IV dressed in the fineries of modern technology has only highlighted the things that made it such a classic in the first place. "Nowadays, RPGs



An augment is a bit of a character's "essence" that can be gifted to someone else. You can earn them from departing party members, NPCs, and even fallen bosses. But consider your options carefully: each augment can only be used once, and each character can only equip a total of five abilities at once.

Cecil HP 8746 MP 999
Blink
Focus
Rydia HP 4840 MP 443
Blink
Kain HP 6019 MP 599
Jump
Rosa HP 4567 MP 421
Blink
Dualcast
Edge HP 3031 MP 558
Focus
Attack
HELP

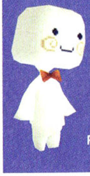
have a tendency to be excessively drawn out and overly verbose in their storytelling, oftentimes losing their focus along the way," notes Tokita. But Final Fantasy IV retains the disciplined structure of an era in which time and space constraints forced developers to trim every last ounce of fat from their games. It may feel a little hokey by modern standards, but Final Fantasy IV's rollicking adventure is lean, fast-paced and immediately engaging in a way that you rarely see in contemporary games. With the DS's ability to deliver impressive graphics at reasonable development budgets, is there any chance we might once again see original games in this style? According to Asano, there is hope. "The concept of making these good old-school RPGs with present-day technology seems to be going over quite well, and I don't think there's any reason for us to limit ourselves to remakes. We've put together an incredibly talented team with a lot of know-how through the process of developing Final Fantasy III and Final Fantasy IV, so I think that [making something entirely new] is a definite possibility for us in the future."

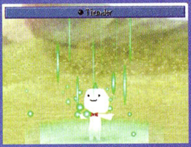
In the meantime, the upcoming release of Final Fantasy IV on the DS is a great opportunity for those of you who weren't around for the great schoolyard debates of 1991 to play the definitive version of a true classic. And if you were around back then, you'll surely relish the opportunity to get your butt kicked by Golbez's minions in ways it's never been kicked before.

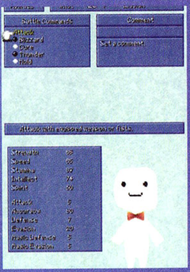
BATTLE *of* WHYTS

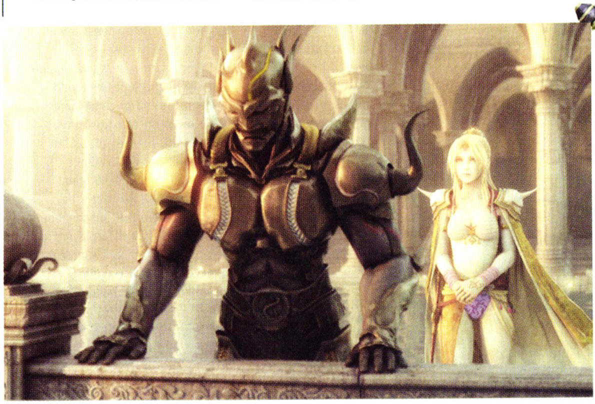
When you first recruit Rydia, you'll find a strange new creature in her summon list. A Whyt is an "undeveloped" Eidolon, which can be summoned not for a one-shot effect, but to temporarily replace a summoner in battle. Whyt's efficacy is based entirely on you—its starting stats are all big fat zeros, but you can boost them by having your heroes spend some quality time training Whyt in a variety of fields. Each stat has a corresponding minigame requiring a certain character. For example, Rydia can guide Whyt through Rydia's Mathemagical Minute, a Professor Layton-esque brain-teaser in which you must add, subtract, multiply and divide four numbers so that you end up with 10 every time. If you scored poorly on your math SATs but excelled at the goblin-slaying portion, you can instead raise your Whyt to be a physical powerhouse by mastering Cecil and Kain's action-oriented games, both of which involve stabbing enemies with your stylus. Once it has some stats to back up its moves, you can assign your Whyt a slate of any five spells or abilities (with exceptions) known by members of your party.

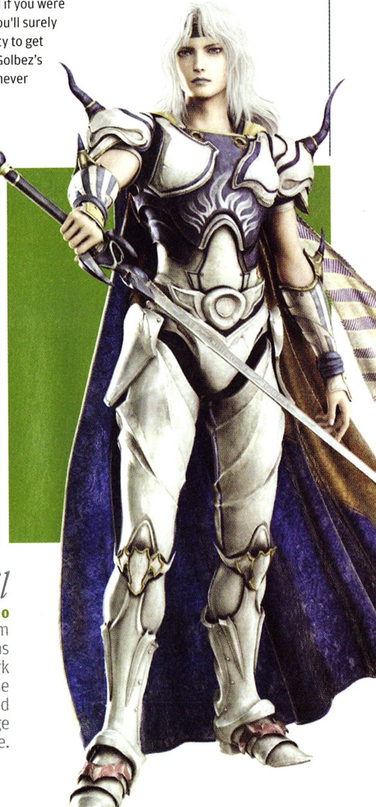
Once your Whyt is combat-ready, you can customize it further by redrawing its face, and then pit it against your friends' Whyts in wireless combat. One thing is clear: of all FFIV's many innovations, Whyt is easily the strangest.







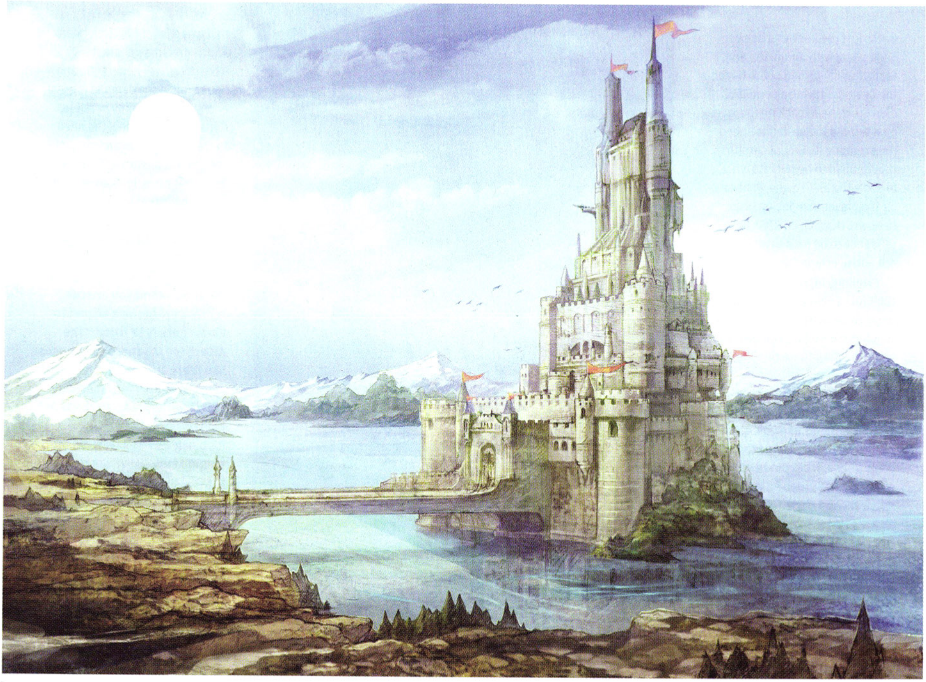




Cecil

NEW ABILITIES FOR CECIL 3.0

The Dark Wave ability of Cecil's Dark Knight phase was mysteriously cut from the North American version of the SNES original, but restored in later versions of the game. It's now been cut again, and replaced with the Final Fantasy III Dark Knight's ability, which creates a lasting effect that boosts attack at the expense of Cecil's HP. As a Paladin, Cecil still has the Cover ability, but Raise, Shell and Protect have now been added to his spell list, giving him relevant White Mage abilities for the latter half of the game.



AN INTERVIEW *with* TAKASHI TOKITA, CREATOR (AND RECREATOR) *of* FINAL FANTASY IV

Takashi Tokita has been at Square Enix for nearly two decades. In addition to writing and directing Final Fantasy IV, one of the most influential role-playing games in history, he has worked on Chrono Trigger, the Parasite Eve series, and many of the recent portable Final Fantasy-series remakes. He was kind enough to take a few minutes to tell us about his time at Square Enix, the original development of Final Fantasy IV, and the evolution of story-driven video games.

NINTENDO POWER **Your earliest credits at Square are for sound effects in Rad Racer II and Final Fantasy III. Can you tell us how you went from working on the audio team to becoming the lead writer and designer for Final Fantasy IV?**

TAKASHI TOKITA Actually, I started at Square as a designer, not as a member of the audio team. I was a pixel artist. But of course I did whatever I could when I had the time—planning, sound effects, visual effects, you name it. Having the chance to work on games from so many perspectives was a great experience. I had originally been involved in theater, so I gained a lot of experience writing scripts, acting, and dealing with sound, amongst other tasks.

We're very interested by what it must have been like to write and design the first character-driven Final Fantasy game. In the era when Final Fantasy IV was developed, most video game heroes were a blank slate, and giving them backstories and personalities was very unusual. Were you concerned by how players would react to the focus on story in Final Fantasy IV?

I think Dragon Quest II and Final Fantasy II were both big influences. I had an interest in drama to begin with, and Dragon Quest II, which a friend of mine happened to work on, showed me the potential RPGs had for storytelling. That really piqued my interest in game design. There was also the desire to have Final Fantasy IV combine the best elements of the previous three games in the series. The unique characters and fast-paced story were elements taken from Final Fantasy II and pushed to the next level in Final Fantasy IV. I knew there would be some players both for and against such a heavily character-driven story, but I believed the depth and individuality of the characters and the major plot developments would serve to make the story more convincing and the game more enjoyable.

In an interview with the Japanese magazine *Famitsu*, you mentioned that only 25% of your original scenario for Final Fantasy IV made it into the game. How much of that were you able to add into this version?

That's right. There were certain core elements of the story that we couldn't include before, and we wanted to make sure they made it into the game this time.

Were the remaining parts of your scenario cut for artistic reasons, or because of development time and cartridge space limitations?

It was just the limited space we had to deal with. But in the end, I think it really turned out to be for the best. Removing all but 25% didn't just mean hacking the story apart—it meant we had to spend time refining it. A lot of careful thought had to be put into what to show the player, and what to let the player imagine on his or her own. Nowadays, RPGs have a tendency to be excessively drawn out and overly verbose in their storytelling, oftentimes losing their focus along the way. I think the main reason for that might be that there is no longer a concern about wasting space on things that could be left out.

The FFIV DS remake incorporates elements like voice and rendered event scenes that were only a dream in 1990. Do you feel that video games have now reached their full potential as a story-telling medium? How would you like to see them evolve in the future?
I don't think they've reached their full potential, and the reason for that is simple: there is no limit on potential when it comes to storytelling. We're seeing a lot of different technologies come together these days, and not just in games. But people shouldn't do something just because they can. They need to think about what they should and shouldn't do. For example, when it comes to painting works of art, having more colors on your palette doesn't necessarily mean the end result will be a masterpiece. I think we're slipping back into a bit of a conceptual age right now and it is said that going backwards is a form of progress.

When Final Fantasy IV was released in the U.S. (as Final Fantasy II), many changes were made. Some moves were removed, hidden passages were made visible, and the difficulty balance was altered. Do you recall why these changes were made?
Ah, that brings back memories. I believe the localization was handled by our Seattle office back then. I seem to recall a lot of the features being modified to make them easier to understand for U.S. players who did not have the chance to play the original Final Fantasy II and III, which had only been released in Japan at the time.

We understand that Final Fantasy IV was originally made by a team of only 14 people. Do you think there is still a place in the Japanese game industry for projects of that size and scope?
Of course. I don't think the size or scope of a game is an issue. It doesn't take an orchestra to play music; a small band can play wonderfully. There are a lot of small development teams like that in North America doing quite well right now. I'm currently working on an unannounced title that's being developed on a scale no different than that of the original Final Fantasy IV, and I hope North American gamers will give it a try.

You co-directed Chrono Trigger, which is very highly regarded in America. Would you have any interest in revisiting that franchise? Is a DS remake a possibility?
Chrono Trigger was a no-holds-barred, swashbuckling adventure that was a lot of fun to work on. Akira Toriyama's characters were great—very energetic and appealing. If the demand is great enough, it's certainly possible. But as a creator, I feel the need to create new titles and not just series installments and remakes. I realize it's a little strange for me to be saying that in an interview about Final Fantasy IV [laughs]. But I need to remind myself of that, too.

We understand you are currently working on a sequel to Final Fantasy IV titled "The After" for Japanese cell phones. Are there any plans to make this game available for American Final Fantasy fans, perhaps as a DS port?
It's being very well received by fans in Japan. We've worked hard to make the fans in Japan happy, first with the DS release and then with the cell phone title. As for North America...well, we'd love to hear what the fans would like us to deliver!

In your years at Square Enix you have held many different positions: writer, director, producer, designer. Which have you found most satisfying?
The position doesn't really matter. I write and throw out ideas even when I'm working as a producer. I consider myself more of a "creator." I don't like to limit myself to being just a producer or just a director.

Now that you've had a chance to go back and remake Final Fantasy IV, are there any other titles you've worked on that you would like to revisit?
This remake came about as a result of the producer, Mr. Asano, and the development staff at MATRIX who had played the original, then became creators, and then expressed interest in developing a new Final Fantasy IV. It was very fortunate. If other members of the younger generation who have played my games come to me wanting to work on something again, I'd love the chance to make an entirely new title together, and I think I ought to!

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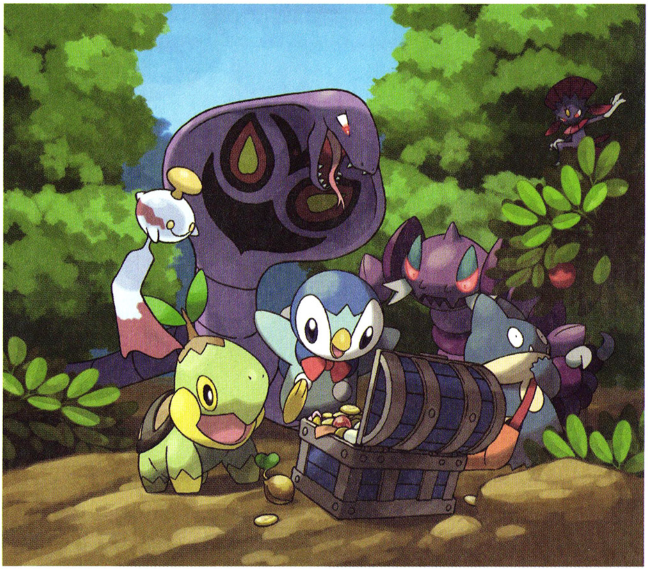
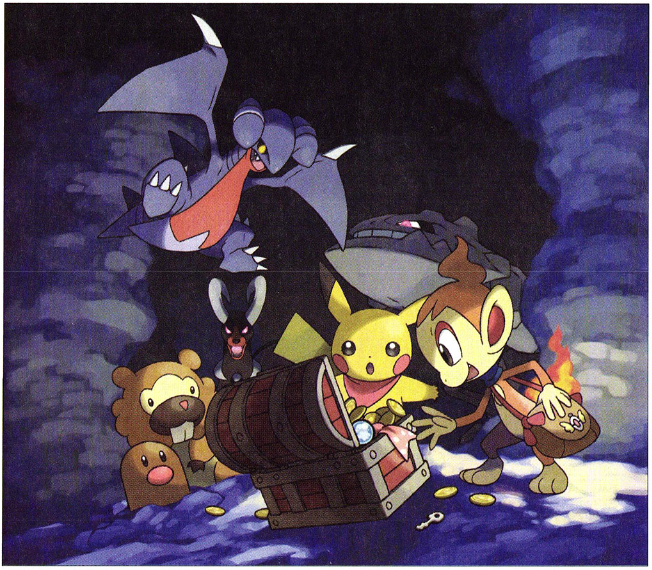
CALL ME POKÉMON

The Pokémon universe beckons anew with **Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time** and **Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness,** launching April 20th. But be warned: once you've stepped into one of these engrossing DS adventures, you may never want to return to a mundane human existence.

BY SCOTT PELLAND





Once upon a time, merely training Pokémon was enough to satisfy the cravings of most Pokémon fans. But what if you could immerse yourself further and actually become a Pokémon? That dream takes on new life in Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness (the second adventure in the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon series) as you are transformed into a Pokémon and whisked away to a Pokémon paradise, where something has gone terribly amiss. By talking to and engaging with your fellow Pokémon, you'll set out to recruit a crack exploration team dedicated to solving the riddles that threaten to plunge the world into darkness. Let's take a closer look at the many ways in which you'll delve deeper into the Pokémon fantasy than ever before.

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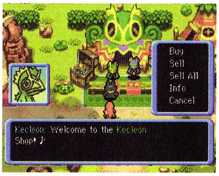
WAKE UP AND SMELL THE POKÉMON

Your adventure begins on a wave-swept beach near Treasure Town, where you wash up as one of 16 Pokémon—Bulbasaur, Chikorita, Treecko, Turtwig, Charmander, Cyndaquil, Torchic, Chimchar, Squirtle, Totodile, Mudkip, Piplup, Pikachu, Meowth, Skitty, or Munchlax. Which Pokémon you become is determined by how you answer a series of questions designed to reveal your inner Pokémon. In addition to your responses, the game examines your special "aura" when you press a finger to the touch screen. Mysterious calculations result in your transformation from human to Pokémon. Congratulations! Then you have to choose a Pokémon partner, so knowledge of the 17 Pokémon types (such as Grass, Fire, Water, and Ground) will help you select the right Pokémon to complement your character. Finally, you're ready for your adventure to begin.

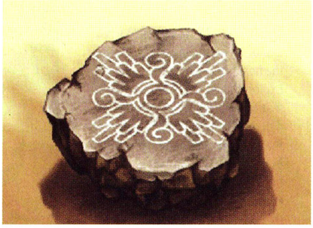


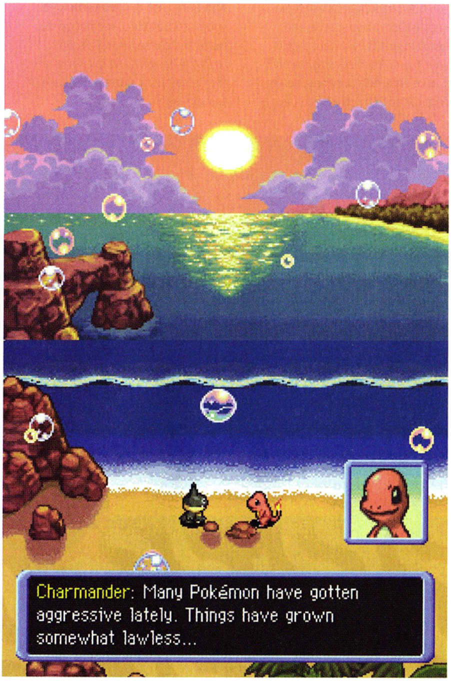
Kecleon: Welcome to the Kecleon Shop! ♪

EXPLORATION 101

Once your new partner befriends you on the beach, you'll head to Wigglytuff's Guild, which you'll call home throughout the game. As you and your partner train to become Guild explorers, you'll learn about the marvelous new world around you, including fellow Guild members, the Guild's many facilities, Treasure Town and its handy shops, and the basics of choosing jobs, exploring dungeons, fighting pitched battles, using items, and moving around. You'll also begin to hear rumblings about increasing outlaw activity and concerns about the mysterious Time Gears, which control the flow of time in their respective regions. While you're hurrying about doing jobs and establishing your explorer cred, various events begin to reveal the larger picture, in which you'll become a central player. Divided into chapters, the game follows events involving the Time Gears, a mysterious figure who seems to be set on stealing them, and your own curious and valuable connection to time. Such Pokémon as earth-altering Groudon, shadowy Grovyle, and Uxie, rumored to erase memories, all play roles. We don't want to spoil the game, so suffice it to say that the story is deep, full of surprises, and rich with Pokémon characters that exhibit a wide range of emotions and motivations.

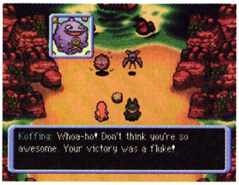
Mysteries abound in the game, such as the meaning of the symbol on your partner's Relic Fragment, or the ultimate goal of a thief who seems determined to steal the Time Gears.





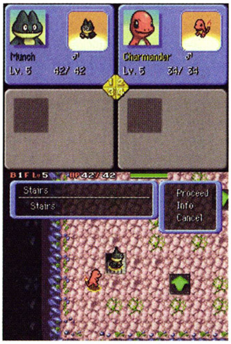
Charmander: Many Pokémon have gotten aggressive lately. Things have grown somewhat lawless...

As you shake the seaweed from your head, you'll learn that you can understand and talk to Pokémon. Your partner has a wonderful gift for understatement.

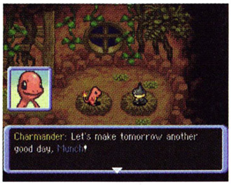


Koffing: Whoa-ho! Don't think you're so awesome. Your victory was a fluke!

Not all Pokémon will be happy to see you, especially the thugs of Team Skull.



In our exclusive hands-on with the North American game versions, your author transformed into Munchlax and chose to be called Munch, then he picked Charmander as his partner; you'll see those two names in many of the screenshots here. Your adventure will vary according to the choices you make.

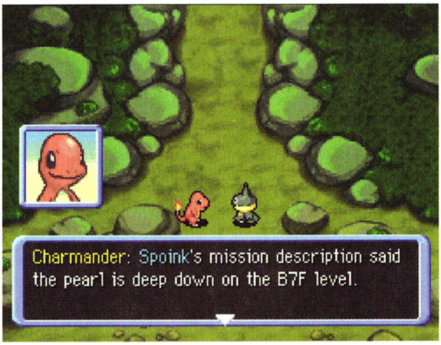


Charmander: Let's make tomorrow another good day, Munch!

HEART OF DARKNESS

Exploring mysterious places lies at the heart of Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness. The games feature randomly generated dungeon maps and a battle system that is both more active than those found in traditional Pokémon RPGs (since you can see enemies, maneuver around them, and attack them directly without choosing a menu option) and easier to master (since you'll control primarily your own character instead of swapping Pokémon the way Trainers do). One key difference is that if you faint in a dungeon, you'll lose all your hard-won money and at least half your items! That's what makes the rescue function so important. In Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness, you can ask a friend to rescue a trapped team, or you can send out an SOS to the world and hope a friendly Pokémon (player) will heed your call and save the day via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

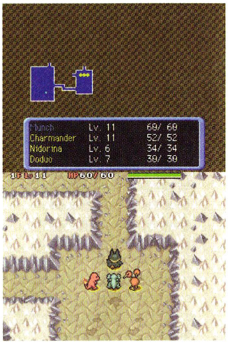
When you're not in need of rescuing, you'll explore the maze while trying to fulfill job objectives, such as finding a lost Pokémon or item, bringing an outlaw to justice, or searching for clues to the mysterious events taking place. You'll find lots of useful items lying about on the ground, and you may earn special items from client Pokémon by fulfilling job goals, not to mention pick up some scratch that can be used in Treasure Town to purchase supplies. You'll also earn Experience Points in battle, and some of the Pokémon you meet in dungeons will be so impressed with your style and heroism that they'll want to join your team. On the downside, once you've entered a dungeon, you're committed to it (unless you have a special escape item) and most of what you're carrying is on the line. And since each dungeon is unique, you won't be able to memorize the maze and cruise through it. Due to all the dangers and mysteries in the dungeons, it's prudent to take things slowly.



Charmander: Spoink's mission description said the pearl is deep down on the B7F level.

A quick recap of mission goals before entering the dungeon can keep you focused on what's important. In this case, you might want to head to the seventh floor as fast as possible to find the pearl.

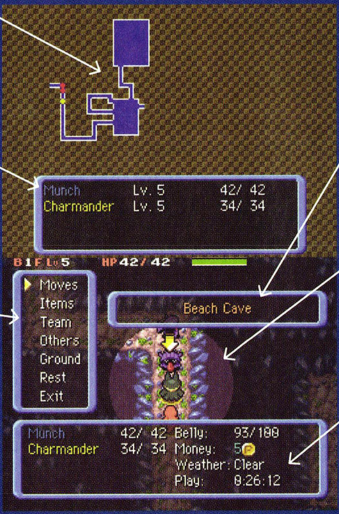
Dungeons don't have to be dingy underground labyrinths. Some dungeons are in forests, mountains, swamps, or fields.



```
Munch       Lv. 11   60/ 60
Charmander  Lv. 11   52/ 52
Nidorina    Lv. 6    34/ 34
Doduo       Lv. 7    30/ 30
```

Dungeon Survival Kit

You'll have plenty of options and information to help you on your dungeon journeys. We've noted some of the essentials here.



```
Munch       Lv. 5   42/ 42
Charmander  Lv. 5   34/ 34
```

```
Munch       42/ 42  Belly:   93/100
Charmander  34/ 34  Money:   5
                    Weather: Clear
                    Play:    0:26:12
```

THE MAP The outline of the current dungeon floor appears as you explore it. In addition to displaying the rooms and corridors as you enter them, the map also displays your team's position (as yellow dots) and enemy locations (red dots) plus items shown in green, and stairways to the next level depicted as green boxes.

TEAM DATA In the top-screen display configuration shown here, team data includes Pokémon names, their levels, and their current and maximum HP. Alternate display options show more team information but relegate the dungeon map to transparent or shaded overlays on the bottom screen.

MENUS Opening the menu options gives you access to commands and information. Choose Moves to select a battle move, Items if you want to use an item (whether you're in battle or not), Team to check on the status of your team, Others to access information such as mission objectives or display settings, Ground to see if there's something of interest on the ground, Rest to quickly save your progress, and Exit to quit.

LOCATION This bar indicates which dungeon you're in. If you check the upper-left corner of the bottom screen, you'll also see what floor you're on.

SCENE You'll see everything that's going on in the game around your Pokémon, including your team members, the dungeon, and enemies in the vicinity. In this dark dungeon, visibility in the corridors is limited.

ADDITIONAL DATA Here you'll find essential information, such as how full your belly is, local weather conditions, how much money you have, and how long you've played.

BATTLE TATTLE

If exploring dungeons is at the heart of the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon experience, then battling Pokémon is the core of the dungeon experience. Enemies appear as red dots on your map, and you'll see them in person if they're close enough to you. The game's turn-based movement system allows you to plan each encounter, as in tactical strategy games such as Fire Emblem. Every time you move a square, the enemy will also move a square, usually straight toward you. Once you meet an enemy, assuming you haven't attacked and destroyed it with a long-range weapon, you'll have the option to attack it directly or choose a move or item from the menu. Regular attacks are relatively weak compared to menu-based moves, but you can make an unlimited number of them, and they become stronger as your character gains levels. Like in Pokémon RPGs such as Diamond and Pearl, Pokémon learn new moves as their levels increase, and they are limited to four moves at a time. Perhaps the coolest battle strategy in the game is the option to use Linked Moves. Up to four moves can be linked together at Electivire's shop in Treasure Town, and depending on the moves you link, the effect can be catastrophic for your opponents.

As for the Pokémon you'll encounter, more than 490 inhabit this world, including all the new Pokémon from Diamond and Pearl.

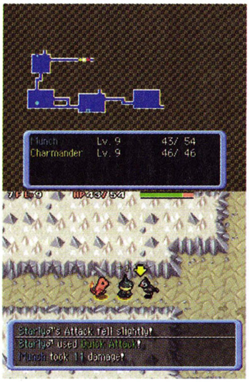
In addition to battling them, you'll have opportunities to recruit them to your team.

TOURING TREASURE TOWN

The local town is full of service shops and gossip. Routinely visiting Treasure Town before setting off to explore a dungeon is a good idea, because you'll want to store excess items that you won't use while exploring, purchase supplies that you'll need during your trip, create Linked Moves your team can use in battle, and deposit your cash so that you won't lose your fortune if you faint. You can even train in the dojo once it opens for business, and don't forget to check with the Pokémon you meet to see what's on their minds.

YOUR GUILD GUIDE

Wigglytuff played a relatively minor role in Blue Rescue Team and Red Rescue Team; it was the proprietor of the Friend Area shop, where you bought access to the many Friend Areas. Now Wigglytuff is in charge of a powerful Guild of explorers. In effect, Wigglytuff is your boss. Your life revolves around the Guild in every

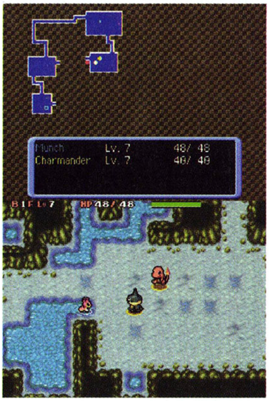


Munch Lv. 9 43/ 54
Charmander Lv. 9 46/ 46

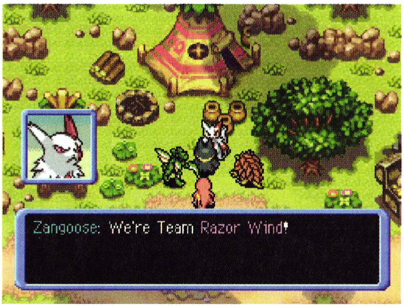
Starly♂'s Attack fell slightly!
Starly♂ used Quick Attack!
Munch took 11 damage!

Status conditions and damage results (which take into account type-trumping damage calculations) appear in the text display during battles and will be familiar to Pokémon RPG veterans.

You can see enemy Pokémon approaching and prepare to meet them head-on or, if you're hurt or just shy, you can tuck your tail and flee.

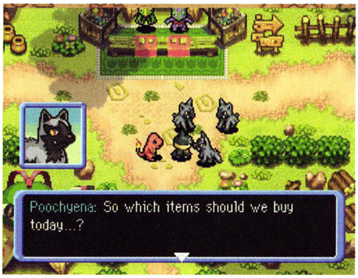


Munch Lv. 7 48/ 48
Charmander Lv. 7 48/ 48

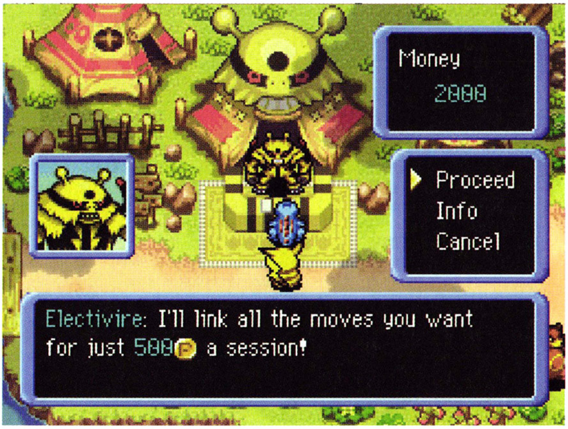


Zangoose: We're Team Razor Wind!

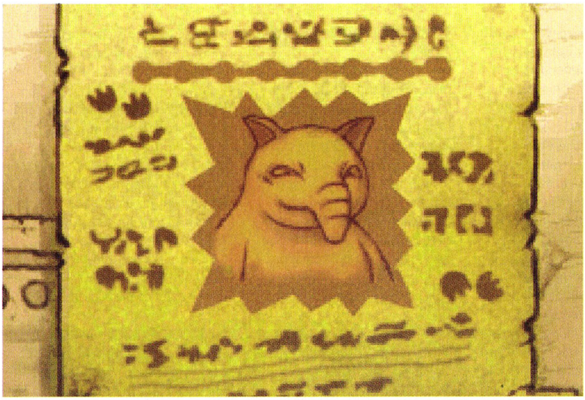
It's a good idea to talk to the town's inhabitants and visit every shop. You never know who you'll meet or what you'll learn.



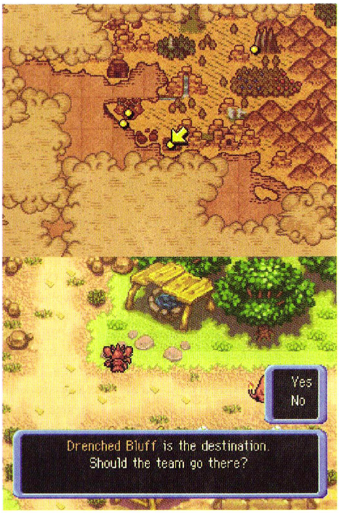
Poochyena: So which items should we buy today...?



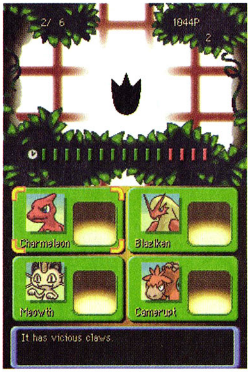
Electivire: I'll link all the moves you want for just 500 a session!



Outlaws such as Drowzee are some of the toughest Pokémon you'll encounter while working for the Guild.

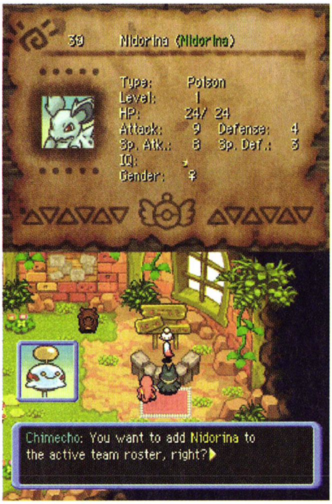


Drenched Bluff is the destination.
Should the team go there?



It has vicious claws.

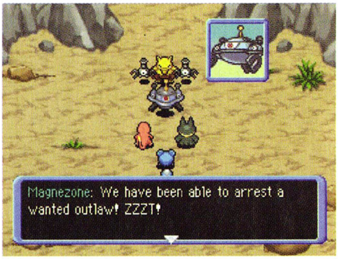
Filling in for Diglett, you'll play a minigame in which you must recognize the footprints of Pokémon who have come to the Guild's front entrance. It's viciously hard.



30 Nidorina (Nidorina)

Type: Poison
Level: 1
HP: 24/ 24
Attack: 9 Defense: 4
Sp. Atk.: 8 Sp. Def.: 5
IQ: ★
Gender: ♀

Chimecho: You want to add Nidorina to the active team roster, right?



Magnezone: We have been able to arrest a wanted outlaw! ZZZT!

Once you bring an outlaw to justice, you'll hand it over to the authorities.

way. You'll eat meals there, sleep there, get jobs there, and receive briefings from Guild officials. You'll even take on extra duties from time to time, such as guarding the Guild's front entrance or being sent on special assignments.

JOB SATISFACTION

Accepting jobs from the bulletin boards and carrying them out satisfactorily takes up most of your game time. Climbing to the Guild's second level after the morning pep talk, you'll look over the job board and the outlaw postings. Every job includes a description of performance goals, the job's location, and a letter grade suggesting both the difficulty of the undertaking and the number of Team Points you'll earn if you complete it. Once you've accepted a job posting but before heading outside to take on the job, you can stop by Chimecho's desk to assemble additional team members to take with you. Even though the job location's dungeon map will change each time you visit it, the types of Pokémon found there will remain the same for each visit, making it easy to choose the most effective Pokémon type combinations for each expedition.

BETTER THAN EVER

Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness improve on virtually every aspect of the experience from Blue Rescue Team and Red Rescue Team. The biggest advancement is the inclusion of Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection (WFC) features. You can send Help Mail to friends, or you can make requests via e-mail or cell phone if you register friend codes. SOS Mail is a request for rescue from any good Samaritan on WFC. Another cool wireless addition is the ability to battle other players' teams either via local wireless connection or via WFC, although the option is activated only after you've spent considerable time playing the adventure. In Japan, Nintendo has provided extra missions to WFC users, which may come here as well. Veterans of the first games will also notice richer graphics, better control options, the absence of

Friend Areas—exasperatingly long trips to which have been replaced by a quick stop at Chimecho's desk in the Guild for assembling teams—and a number of new features such as Pokémon Eggs, special items that Croagunk can combine to form even more special items, and Treasure Boxes (found in dungeons) that Xatu can appraise for still more special goodies.

MYSTERY SOLVED

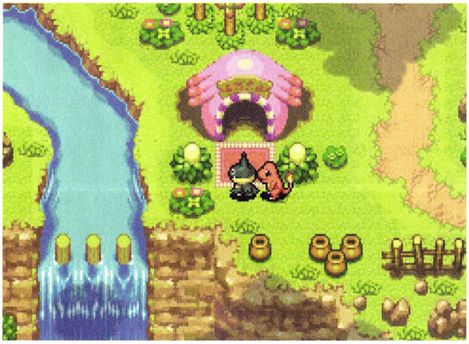
The two newcomers to the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon series immerse players in the dramatic events unfolding in the all-Pokémon world. They serve up tremendous replay value with limitless dungeons and jobs, include the entire cast of Pokémon known to date, and they deliver truly useful connectivity via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. As for the differences between the two games, they're fairly limited—a few Pokémon (that you can trade from one version to the other), one or two items, and some different missions—so there's no real reason to collect them both. If you're familiar with Blue or Red Rescue Team, you'll appreciate the improved graphics, better game flow, and easier-to-use control options. That's a lot of reasons to go exploring.

Dungeon Legacy

In 2006, Nintendo, The Pokémon Company, and Chunsoft teamed up to introduce the Mystery Dungeon style of play to the Pokémon world. Chunsoft's *Fushigi no Dungeon* series, on which Pokémon Mystery Dungeon games are based, had been evolving since the 1990s through multiple titles and platforms, beginning on the Super NES. Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team and Red Rescue Team—for the DS and Game Boy Advance, respectively—arrived on this side of the Pacific to critical yawns, which turned to blinks of surprise as hundreds of thousands of Pokémon fans bought into the premise—a remarkable performance for the dungeon crawler genre, which had been largely overlooked by North American gamers. The roots of dungeon crawlers reach back to early RPG adventures such as Dungeons & Dragons and text-based graphic computer adventures like Rogue, which focused on collecting treasure and battling enemies in randomly generated dungeons. In Japan, where Chunsoft's dungeon crawlers have received considerable accolades, Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness launched in September 2007 and sold well over a million copies. With this level of success, we're sure to see more of these rich adventures expanding the DS's role-playing library.

NINTENDO DS
Pokémon
Mystery Dungeon
BLUE RESCUE TEAM
The Pokémon Company
Nintendo

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team and Red Rescue Team surprised the critics who considered the games to be too simple. It wasn't the first time that a critic misread the appeal of Pokémon.



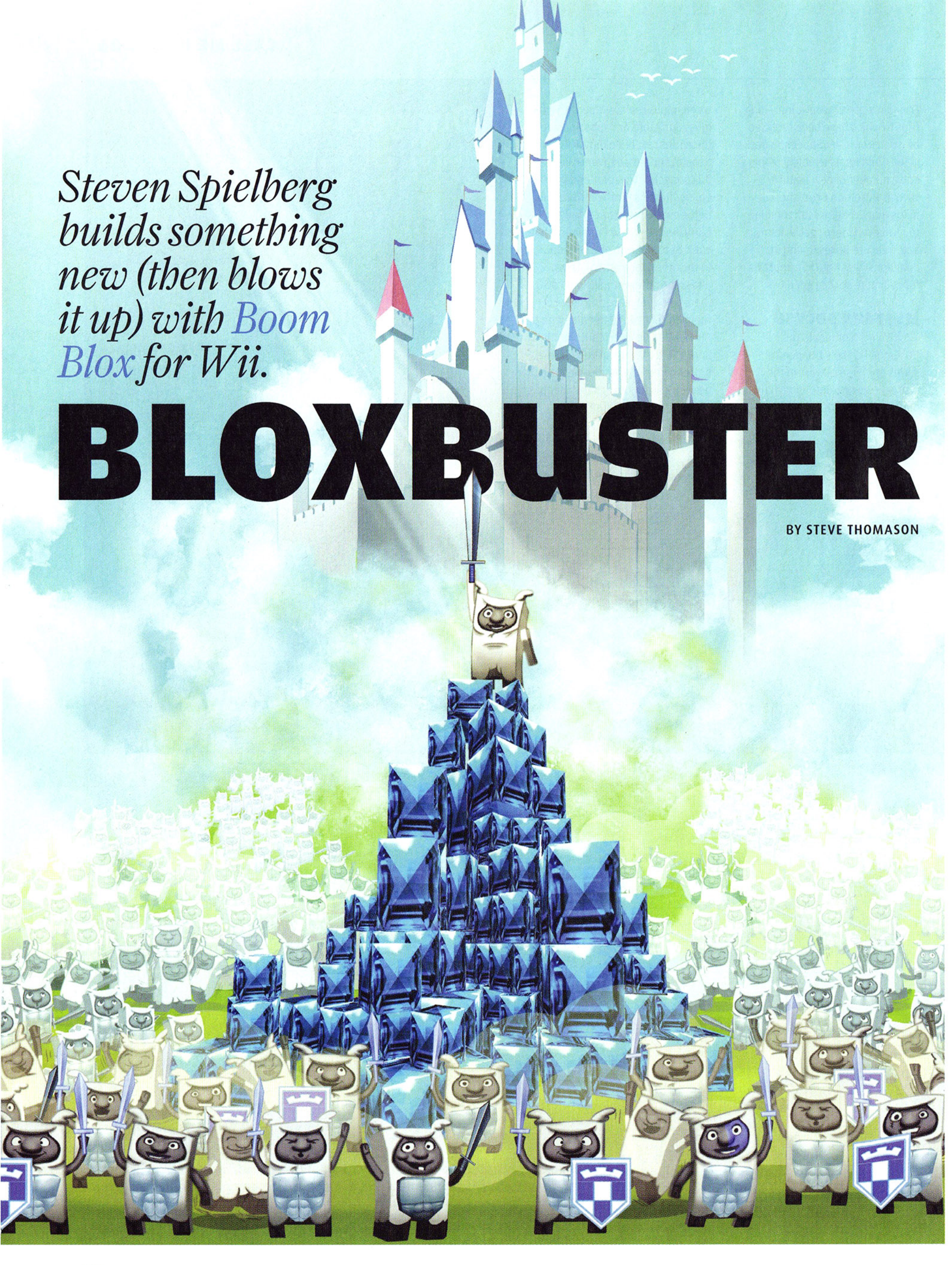
Pelipper: Hello! Would you like to go on a rescue?

The fate of the Time Gears and the worlds of Explorers of Time and Explorers of Darkness won't be decided by this crafty thief, but by the efforts of you and your exploration team. All will be revealed in time.

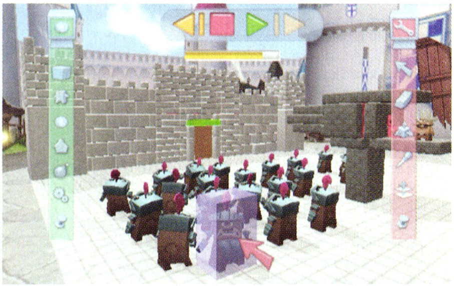
Steven Spielberg builds something new (then blows it up) with Boom Blox for Wii.

BLOXBUSTER

BY STEVE THOMASON

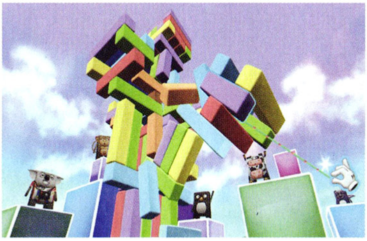


Back at the 2006 Electronic Entertainment Expo (where Wii officially began its quest for global domination), legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg famously dropped by the Nintendo booth to play Wii Sports tennis with his game-design counterpart, Shigeru Miyamoto. We never did find out who won the match, but like so many other gamers, the bearded auteur was immediately hooked—so much so that he began brainstorming ideas for his own Wii game. Spielberg wanted to create something that embraced the spirit of the platform and that he could enjoy with his own family and friends. Collaborating with Electronic Arts's Los Angeles studio, the famed director came up with Boom Blox, a Wii-exclusive puzzler unlike anything we've seen before.



[Above] Stephen Colbert was right—the bear-pocalypse is upon us!

At first glance, one might liken the game to Jenga, but though Boom Blox shares some similar mechanics with the popular tower-building game, there's a lot more to it. In addition to grabbing, pulling and stacking blocks, you'll also shoot them, throw things at them, and trigger all sorts of other interactions over approximately 300 levels. Your objectives throughout are many and varied, and the game's universe is governed by a remarkably deep physics engine. The blocks move and respond to your various inputs precisely as they should, providing the festivities with an impressive level of sophistication. For example, if you're trying to dislodge a block from the bottom of a large stack, you can throw a ball at the edge of your target to make the block spin outward. You've got to throw the ball with enough mustard, though, or it's likely to just bounce off. Better yet, you could detonate a bomb block and send the whole thing flying.

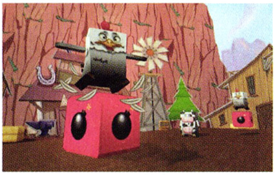


There are more than a dozen such special blocks, each with unique attributes that add another layer of depth. If you hit a purple block, for instance, it will disappear along with any adjacent blocks of the same color, potentially setting of a chain reaction. Green blocks are completely innocuous on their own, but they'll explode violently if they come in contact with each other. Adding another piece to the puzzle (so to speak) are more than 30 critters that wreak various types of havoc on the game board. Beavers seek out and ignite bomb blocks, monkeys throw baseballs, and grim reapers tirelessly hunt down any other characters on the game board. Jenga this most definitely is not.

SOLO PROJECT

The single-player offerings in Boom Blox consist of Explore mode and Adventure mode. The former is a comprehensive tutorial of sorts, introducing you to the myriad gameplay concepts and encouraging you to hone your skills with increasingly complex challenges. You'll then put that experience to work in Adventure mode, which offers four unique quests—a medieval war epic, a Western, a jungle story, and a Halloween tale. While the narratives aren't exactly *Saving Private Ryan* material, they're charmingly told with picture-book-style cut scenes, and they revolve around the likeably goofy antics of those aforementioned critters (though it must be said that the travails of the peace-loving sheep kingdom at the hands of its grizzly aggressors are no laughing matter).

More importantly, the levels that make up each quest boast lots of diversity and make creative use of the game's numerous mechanics; you're not just knocking down towers or building stacks. In the jungle scenario, there's a level where a mama gorilla is trying to get to her babies, and to lower the barrier from her path before the little ones are kidnapped, you must quickly remove certain blocks from the surrounding mechanism in the proper sequence. During the Halloween quest, one level tasks you with protecting trick-or-treaters by taking out marauding reapers—either by shooting the ghouls directly or by triggering traps. And in the sheep's noble campaign against the tyrannical bear empire, you'll have to detonate explosives to repel the grizzly invaders before they can rob your treasury. Given the game's multifaceted nature, successful completion of your goals requires a mix of logic, quick reflexes, a willingness to experiment, and a steady hand. Fortunately, the controls are up to the task. The various uses of the Wii remote are simple and intuitive, and the sensitivity during our play test was spot on. As mentioned previously,



[Above] Chickens lay bomb blocks, and beavers blow them up, allowing for some explosive combinations.

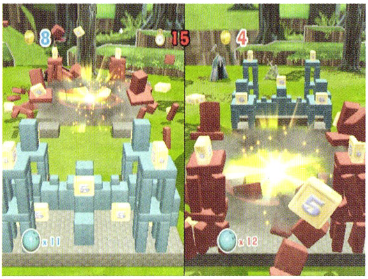
you have full control over the speed of your throws, and when trying to pull a block from a stack, you can either ease it out gently or yank it out with a quick jerk.

BUILDING BLOX

In keeping with Spielberg's original aspirations, Boom Blox also gives you lots of ways to enjoy its shenanigans with friends. Up to four players can compete or cooperate in a huge selection of turn-based and simultaneous-play modes. The activities include throwing balls at blocks to send them flying through bull's-eyes, trying to blast as many blocks as possible into your opponent's goal, and yes, even taking turns pulling blocks from a tower until it collapses. There's an astonishing amount of content, and the game has a definite addictive quality that should make it a big hit at social gatherings.

Of course, it's only natural to want to come up with your own creations in a game that revolves around building blocks, and Boom Blox's robust level editor lets you do just that. The easy-to-use tools enable you to modify any of the existing levels or construct your own from scratch. You can meticulously design all sorts of crazy structures, set the rules for victory, and place characters anywhere on the stage. Should inspiration strike, you can even build your own Rube Goldberg machine. Some of the stuff we saw from EA's testing department—including a huge battle sequence that has to be seen to be believed and a hilarious recreation of the boulder scene from *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*—demonstrates what the editor is capable of. Best of all, you can share your handiwork with friends via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

According to EA, Spielberg has remained directly involved in the creative process throughout Boom Blox's development. He checks in nearly every week to review the latest version of the game, and frequently offers suggestions on how to make improvements or tweak certain aspects. What we've seen of the results show great promise. We'll find out if the end product has that magic Spielberg touch when Boom Blox hits stores in May.



[Below] Boom Blox is a cautionary tale (just replace the sheep with humans). When the bears attack, they'll be joined by bomb-throwing monkeys. We musn't teach chimps to use explosives!

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Frequent travelers on the information superhighway have likely seen the video of Carnegie Mellon University student Johnny Lee showcasing 3-D head tracking on Wii. Simply by placing a Wii remote in front of the television and fashioning a head-mounted sensor bar (two infrared LEDs), Lee demonstrates how to create a virtual-reality display in which the image changes depending on what angle you view the screen from. The effect is amazing, creating a realistic illusion of depth and space. Ever since we first saw the video, we've been hoping to see the idea implemented in an actual Wii game. It appears EA will be the first to answer our prayers as Boom Blox will include 3-D head tracking as an Easter egg. Naturally, it's difficult to replicate the effect in print, so the best way to wrap your head around the concept is to check out Lee's presentation at johnnylee.net. Fair warning: prepare to have your mind blown.

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1211 votes

ARTIST	SONG	SUBMITTED BY	RATING
And You Will Know Us By The Trail of Dead	The Rest Will Follow	Paul M.	43 votes
System of a Down	B.Y.O.B.	GUITAR	24 votes
Willie Nelson	Black Rose	GUITAR	72 votes
Lauryn Hill	Ex Factor	Fugee Fan 97	24 votes
Our Lady Peace	4 AM	GUITAR	120 votes

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WHO'S YOUR DADDY?
GUITAR WORLD TABS

We talk fisticuffs with Super Smash Bros. creator Masahiro Sakurai.

WAY OF

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN
&
STEVE THOMASON

Though only 37 years of age, Masahiro Sakurai has already assembled an impressive body of work. As a designer at HAL Laboratory, he created ravenous pink puffball Kirby when he was just 19, and in 1999, he conceived Super Smash Bros., which went on to become one of Nintendo's most popular franchises. After setting out to become a freelancer in 2003, Sakurai reunited with Super Smash Bros. collaborator and Nintendo president Satoru Iwata to direct the game that's likely resting in your Wii drive right now: Super Smash Bros. Brawl. To learn more about the game's development—one of the most ambitious in Nintendo's history—we recently sat down with the man behind the Brawl.

THE SAKURAI

NINTENDO POWER: Congratulations on finishing Super Smash Bros. Brawl and on the game's success thus far in Japan. How does it feel to finally be done with this massive project?

MASAHIRO SAKURAI: Thank you, but I really don't feel like I'm finished yet. The reason for that is because we haven't launched here in North America yet. Obviously, it's great that it's been such a success in Japan, but until it's in people's hands around the world, I'm not going to feel like it's completely done. As far as the development process, I'm extremely pleased to be finished.

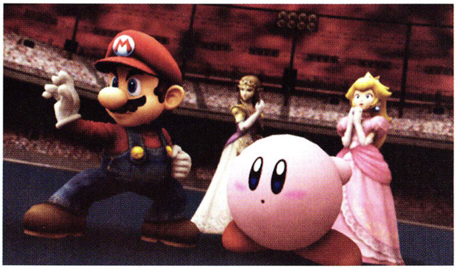
How did the idea for Smash Bros. originally come about? We would think that it would be difficult to get such a concept—where Nintendo's marquee characters duke it out—approved. Was that the case?

First, we came up with the idea of doing a four-player fighting game. Then we took a close look at all of the different types of fighting games out there, and realized that one of the first difficulties we'd encounter is that if you're looking at a game like The Legend of Zelda, you have one main character—Link. Everything revolves around Link and you build the world around him. But with this sort of fighting game, you have not one main character but 12, 16, or however many. So making sure that the world works evenly and uniformly, and is well balanced, with all of these characters is one of the first hurdles that we had to get past.

The first demo that we built was more realistic, using characters sort of like stuntman dummies. So there were realistic body proportions and figures. When we showed that in-house, we were told, "Hey, that's really interesting. You guys have something really good and it's a lot of fun. But will it sell? We don't know." So we had to figure out how we could get what looks like, potentially, a really fun game to appeal to a vast market and sell. And one approach that was suggested to us was replacing the stuntman figures with Nintendo characters. To be honest with you, when they presented us with this idea, we were a little hesitant. We weren't sure if that was the greatest way to go. But looking back at the success of the series, obviously we think it was pretty valuable.

Ever since Brawl was first announced, you made sure that everyone knew that you were going to keep traditional controls, allowing the player to use the GameCube controller or the Classic controller. Why was including that option so important to you?

When you look at the pointing device with the Wii remote or motion controls, we didn't think that was the most appropriate thing for the Smash Bros. universe, and we suspected our players might feel the same way. Nintendo was really focused on building lots of applications and creating lots of uses for that controller, so for us, we felt like maybe we should take kind of a counterintuitive approach. Since everyone else is focused over there, we fill a gap by going in a different direction.



We've been told that you're a veritable encyclopedia of Nintendo knowledge. Where does that love of Nintendo games stem from?
At the age of four or five, I played a paddle-controlled game. Sort of a Pong-esque thing. And I was just amazed by the fact that you could take this controller and control things on your TV screen. That was the beginning of my fascination with what you can do through the world of video games.

As for my knowledge of Nintendo games in particular, I'm not sure. I just remember stuff, I guess. [Laughs] It's the same with music and characters. You play a game and it just sticks with you. There was a period where I was just playing games for research, and for whatever reason, I'm just able to keep all of that knowledge with me. With games that I haven't played all that much, whatever I did play, even that minimal experience, left an impression. However, recently I have begun having trouble remembering people's names. [Laughs]

What were some of the specific tweaks that you made to the core gameplay, and what were your reasons for making them?
First of all, of course, is the inclusion of the Final Smash. If you look at the overall direction of Smash Bros., players can go in and change the setup to match whatever game style they want. You can turn all items off, etc. But really, my vision of Smash Bros. is that it's a party game, really. You've got four people battling it out and you're really not sure who's winning or losing. Or maybe that's not even the point. But I also wanted to have something that could really surprise everybody and shake things up. Even though you're winning the entire match, maybe in the final moment I'm going to win via this new mechanic.

As for other tweaks, the game speed is a little bit slower. That might not be quite so evident, but it affects ease of control, especially now that we're supporting three different controllers. We wanted to make the control intuitive no matter which controller you're using. With Melee, because you were using only the GameCube controller, it was a game based on speed and quick action. However, this time around, I thought I would make it easier to get into and also emphasize the mid-air battle aspect. I thought that the way things worked in Smash Bros. Melee with the speed of fighting being very quick was good in its own way, but with Brawl, I wanted to try emphasizing something a little bit different.

How did you go about choosing which characters to include in the final roster? Were there any characters that you really wish you could have included, but weren't able to for whatever reason?
Of course there were some characters that we couldn't include, but we've decided that we're just not going to talk about them. [Laughs]

As far as choosing which characters, we had to really look at the series that would be represented in the game and create a balance that would make fans of all the series happy. We didn't want to have all Mario characters, all Pokémon characters.... We looked at each series and tried to pick the characters that would have the widest appeal to the largest fan base. And of course, we looked at games like Animal Crossing and Nintendogs, where there aren't really any characters that lend themselves to fighting, and we decided not to include characters from those series as fighting characters.

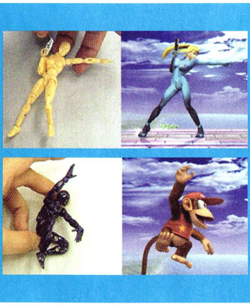
One thing that was kind of a challenge is that we haven't had a lot of new characters from Nintendo since Captain Olimar [that could work well in a fighting game]; a lot of games have been Mario titles or new iterations in existing series.

There was a rumor at one point about Ridley being playable. Was that ever a consideration?
I think that would probably be pretty impossible. [Laughs] If we had put our best efforts into it, we may have been able to do it. But he might have been a little slow. Would that be all right? [Laughs]

We're just glad he made it into the Subspace Emissary. You've talked previously about how Solid Snake ended up in the game, but how about Sonic? How did his inclusion come about?
At the time we announced Snake, we actually put together a survey for our users, asking which characters they would like to see in the game. And a huge amount of people said Sonic, especially in the United States. So in order to satisfy our fans, I thought it was a good idea to try to include Sonic. But that was the thing that put the whole process in motion.

Which characters are you best at playing? Not necessarily your favorite, but the one with which you dominate.
If I had to absolutely win? There isn't really one character I would choose. There are a couple of characters that I *wouldn't* choose. [Laughs] The thing is, I play for fun, so I don't really think about it in those terms.

Can you talk a little bit about the collaboration with Game Arts? How did that come about, and what will become of the team now that Brawl is finished?
When we decided to build Smash Bros., we realized that we needed a lot of people. We needed to build



STRIKING A POSE

A lot of game designers (and gaming magazine editors) have their workspaces decorated with action figures, but we'd wager that few put them to use as well as the Brawl team. To convey his ideas about character stances and animations, Sakurai posed and photographed a vast number of 4-inch Microman action figures in the positions that he envisioned for the Brawl cast. Sakurai equipped the toys with accessories to stand in for weapons such as Snake's missile launcher and Samus's pistol—he even created Pit's bow and blades out of a twisty-tie—and took between 30 and 50 photos for each of the game's characters in various situations (running, jumping, attacking, etc.). Although it was tricky to create poses that conveyed the motions of oddly shaped characters such as Metaknight, the action figures proved extremely useful in bringing the Smash crew to life.

a team. At the same time, Game Arts was finishing up development on Grandia III, so they had some people available. Someone from their board of directors was speaking with Mr. Miyamoto, and Mr. Miyamoto brought up the idea of them working on Smash Bros. That's where the whole process began.

Going forward, we really have no plans after the North American launch. After that, the team will disband. My company, Sora, has to be able to work with other people. We're a freelance company. Whether or not I end up working with Game Arts again, it's all up to fate.

This is one that a lot of hardcore Smash Bros. fans have long wondered about. Was the ability to "Wavedash" in Melee intentional or a glitch?

Of course, we noticed that you could do that during the development period. With Super Smash Bros. Brawl, it wasn't a matter of, "OK, do we leave it in or do we take it out?" We really just wanted this game, again, to appeal to and be played by gamers of all different levels. We felt that there was a growing gap between beginners and advanced players, and taking that out helps to level the playing field. It wasn't a real big priority or anything, but when we were building the game around the idea of making it fair for everybody, it just made sense to take it out. And it also goes back to wanting to make something different from Melee and giving players the opportunity to find new things to enjoy.

Do you have any suggestions for some cool custom match types that you think our readers might enjoy trying?

Well...no. [Laughs] We really just want the players to explore it for themselves. I don't really have any specific match settings that I would recommend. But I do believe that the game is balanced to be played, and be played well, no matter what you do, no matter what pairings you come up with. I think we've done an excellent job of making sure that everything meshes together well. So just get out there and explore. Make up lots of different combinations and we're sure you'll have a good time with whatever you come up with.

DEPTH OF CHARACTER

At the 2008 Game Developers Conference, Sakurai explained how he retained characters' individuality while making them mesh with the Super Smash Bros. world. He specifically discussed three newcomers: Pit, Sonic, and Snake.

PIT

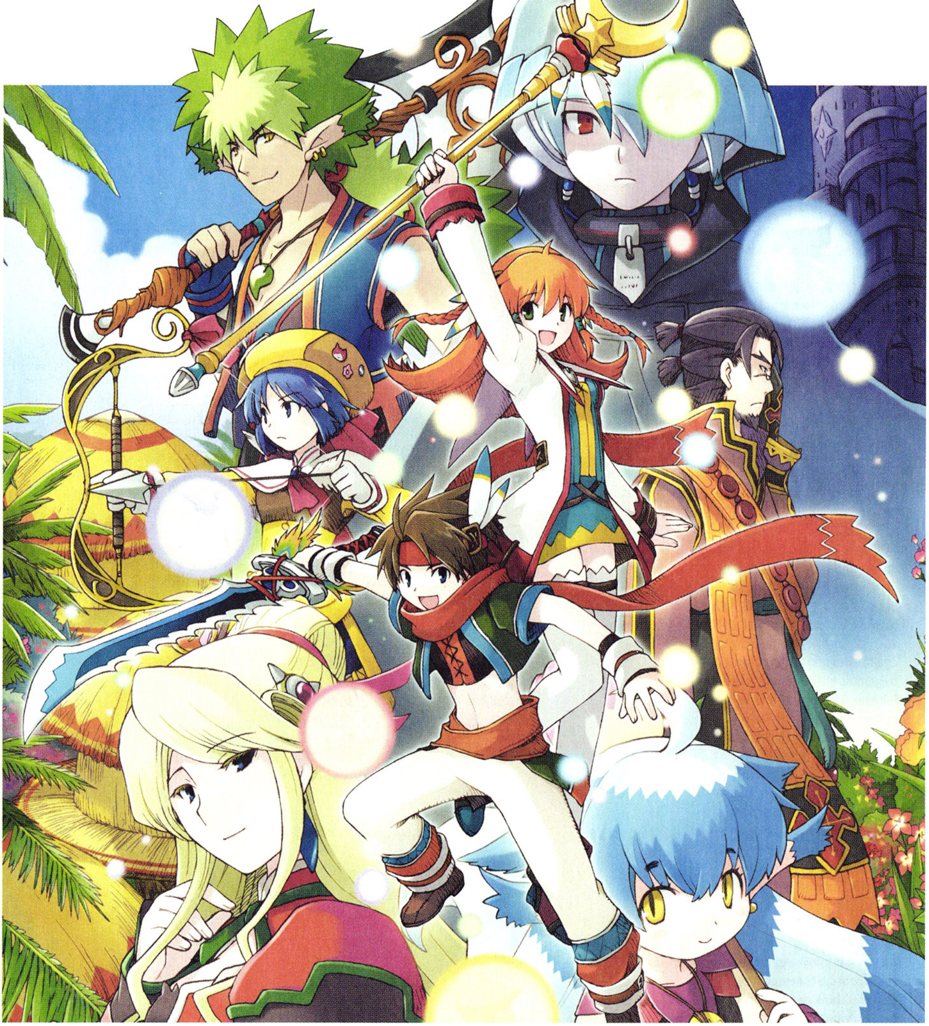
Unlike other Nintendo characters, Pit hasn't changed in nearly 20 years. Sakurai approached the redesign by imagining how Pit would have slowly evolved over a series of games, and arrived at Pit's new look as the result. The designers added a golden laurel branch to his head and gave him golden armbands to evoke images of halos; they also changed his face to look less cartoony and more earnest. Pit gained tights under his toga to convey a youthful image, and ornamentation was added to the toga to provide a feeling of nobility. His boots were designed to be a mix of past and present, incorporating Grecian-style gaiters and fuzzy trim. Sakurai compares Pit's dual blades to Darth Maul's double-bladed lightsaber from *Star Wars Episode I.*

SNAKE

Snake was designed as the slowest human character, but he makes up for his lack of speed with close-quarters combat techniques, cunning, and a plethora of weapons. Sakurai showed some examples of Snake's abilities by planting an explosive on Sonic's face, and by choking out Pit before dragging him on top of a mine to blow him sky-high. Since Snake is known for crawling on his belly, Sakurai kept that aspect in Brawl, but with modified animation; instead of realistically keeping his shoulders near the ground as in the Metal Gear games, Snake crawls in a more raised position.

SONIC

Other than gaining longer legs, Sonic's appearance didn't change much from that of his Sega character model. Sakurai pointed out that there's more to Sonic than pure speed; the character also has a heaviness to him that makes utilizing that speed so satisfying. Since Sonic isn't known for his fighting abilities, Sonic's melee moves were influenced by another Sega property—Virtua Fighter. While most of the Brawl roster was determined during the game's initial planning stages, Sonic is the exception; he was added to the lineup in 2007 after hearing the demands of true-blue hedgehog fans worldwide.



Thou Art Summoned

Heed the adventurer's call with Summon Night: Twin Age, an action-RPG possible only on Nintendo DS.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

Top-down fantasy adventures have been a video game staple for decades. You explore dungeons, fight monsters, acquire items—you know the drill. But as The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass proved, even the traditional can provide an all-new experience when it's tailored to the DS. And that's what Atlus's Summon Night: Twin Age is all about—a fusion of tried-and-true adventuring and easy-to-use DS controls, resulting in an action-RPG that's intuitive enough for newcomers but deep enough for grizzled genre vets.

Set in a world populated by humans, beastlike Kascuza (think of them as nature-loving hippies with funny ears), and creatures called summon beasts, Summon Night: Twin Age lets you choose Reiha, a human girl living among the Kascuza, or Aldo, a young male summon beast, as your main character. Although they're of different species, Aldo and Reiha have grown up together—Reiha summoned Aldo into the world when she was a small child—and they consider each other brother and sister. And while they're happy living apart from their own kind, a mysterious disturbance causes the normally benign spirits of nature to become aggressive, forcing Aldo and Reiha to leave behind their isolated island home and embark on a quest to calm the spirits.

"By featuring the inward struggles and bonds between humans and summon beasts, and telling the story from both perspectives, we were able to tell a dramatic story with a surprising amount of depth," states chief producer Hajime Ishikawa. "The two main characters are quite different, in both their view of the world and their take on the events that will unfold over the course of the game."

The narrative is presented differently depending on which main character you select, but regardless of your choice, you get to control both Aldo and Reiha during gameplay. By tapping an icon in the upper-right corner of the touch screen, you can switch between characters on the fly (assuming they're within close proximity to each other), allowing you to use whoever is best for a given situation. Aldo is primarily a melee fighter who can use blades, axes, or spears, while Reiha uses ranged attacks and is adept at spells. Both, however, are controlled using an almost completely touch-driven interface.

"With the series moving over to the Nintendo DS, we brainstormed different methods by which the player could control the action with the stylus," explains Ishikawa. "Our slogan was 'touch-action RPG.' We researched ways to create a new action-RPG that could be solely controlled by the stylus."

Controlling the heroes couldn't be easier—you simply tap anywhere on the screen to make your character move there, and tap any enemy or interactive object to attack (and keep attacking until the enemy falls). "Contrary to most action games," Ishikawa says, "our goal was to create a fun RPG without a steep learning curve to master the controls."

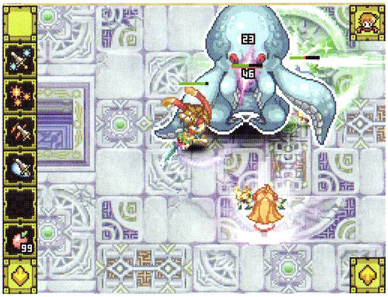
Got Skills?

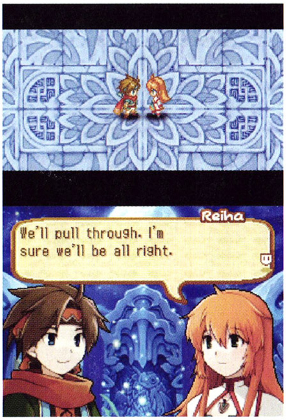
Beyond the basics, however, lies a wealth of combat options. By holding the Control Pad or any button and touching the screen, for example, you can attack without moving your character—great for keeping your distance while using Reiha's projectile attacks. More significantly, by tapping arrows in the lower corners of the screen, you can reveal or hide the Command Palette, which can hold up to 12 items or skills of your choosing, including healing spells, special weapon attacks, health- or magic-restoring items, and more. Using an item or skill is usually as simple as tapping the corresponding icon, then tapping the target of your action. A few skills, however, demand additional touch-screen input, such as Aldo's Land Slash, which requires you to draw lines to unleash a mighty multiple-enemy attack, and Reiha's Flame Burst, which follows the path you mark on the touch screen.

The skills you bring into battle are entirely up to you thanks to the game's customizable skill tree. Through events and by leveling up, you'll acquire Skill Points, which you can allocate as you see fit among 11 ranks of skills (although which skills you can unlock are determined by your level and by which skills you have obtained previously). Both Reiha and Aldo have their own distinct abilities, and you can spend your points to enhance mastery of a few particular skills, or dabble in a number of low-level disciplines.

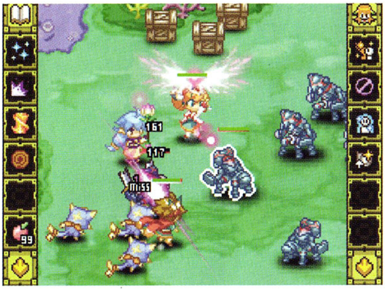
"You can concentrate your skills on attack powers, or go the other way and pick support skills to aid your party," offers Ishikawa. "Also, the skills have elements attached to them, so if you like fire, you can put all of your points into fire and master it. You can therefore create a balanced character or a highly specialized one."

Of course, it wouldn't be right to call a game Summon Night without the ability to call forth creatures in battle, and Twin Age delivers in that regard. By collecting special items from enemy monsters and combining them with flasks, then assigning

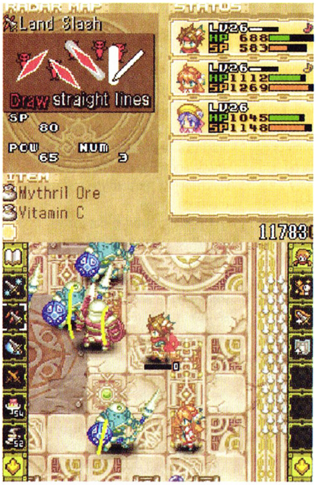


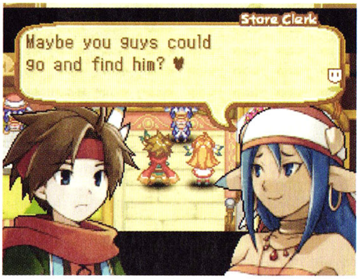

Reiha

We'll pull through. I'm sure we'll be all right.



[Right] End-of-chapter conversations between party members improve how well they cooperate in battle. You can choose which ally to talk to.





Maybe you guys could go and find him? ♥

[Above] Sidequests frequently involve doing favors for the local shopkeepers. [Left] Some combat skills, such as the powerful Land Slash, require additional touch-screen input to execute.

RADAR MAP
STATUS
LV25 HP1486 SP1119
LV25 HP1144 SP1337
LV25 HP2014 SP 923
ITEM
11349

the resultant summoning item to your Command Palette, you can conjure dozens of types of beasts to aid you as you fight through the game's forests, deserts, undersea caverns, swamps, and temples.

Allied Powers

Summoned creatures aren't the only ones who will help you on your quest. Six different allies join Aldo and Reiha during their adventure, such as green-haired Kascuza hero Nassau, magically inclined priestess/princess Ayn, and human summoner-in-training Ticah. With rare exception, only one ally can join you at a time, and though you can't control them directly, each ally has specific skills, attributes, and behavioral patterns; bringing the right one into battle can be critical. As in the Summon Night: Swordcraft Story games released for Game Boy Advance, you can converse with your allies during story intermissions, allowing you to create stronger bonds between the characters.

"Since your relationships (called Support Ranks) with your party members affect the way they behave, it is important to group characters that will work well together," says Ishikawa. "In addition, since the types of enemies you will encounter vary based on the dungeon's elemental balance (fire, water, earth, etc.), you should choose characters that are a good match for the nature of the dungeon."

As in any good action-RPG, Twin Age also features numerous side quests (in which you find items for NPCs or rescue missing persons, among other tasks) and plenty of weapons, armor, accessories, and items to acquire. Although it's not as crucial as in the Summon Night: Swordcraft Story games, you can create items and equipment out of sundries found during your adventure for only a fraction of the cost of buying them outright, plus you can enhance your weapons with magic scrolls (allowing you to, for example, automatically power up your special attacks or add elemental attributes to your strikes). And in case you wind up with more items than you know what to do with (or find yourself in dire need of a certain piece of equipment), you can trade goods with friends over a local wireless connection.

Although the components that make up Summon Night aren't likely to break a lot of new ground, thus far they're coming together nicely in a solid, traditional adventure mixed with modern innovation. If you're looking for something to fill the touch-driven-fantasy void, Twin Age should fit the bill when it hits North America this May.

Nights to Remember

If you didn't play the Summon Night: Swordcraft Story games on Game Boy Advance, don't worry—they aren't directly connected to Twin Age. Actually, you can worry a bit, as they were both quality action-RPGs that didn't get the attention they deserved due to their release late in the GBA's life cycle. Here's what you missed if you overlooked Summon Night's earlier releases.

You're quite a nasty little runt, aren't you!?

SUMMON NIGHT: SWORDCRAFT STORY

As the descendent of a great warrior/swordsmith, it was up to you to prove your worth by becoming the next Craftknight. You could choose from either a male or female protagonist, and depending on how you answered questions at the beginning of the game, you could end up with one of four Summon Beast partners. Most of the game took place in a single, vast dungeon that grew more treacherous the deeper you went.

SUMMON NIGHT: SWORDCRAFT STORY 2

The second Swordcraft Story included many of the features of its predecessor, including your choice of a male or female playable character, multiple Summon Beasts, a wide variety of weapons to forge, and a side-view action-oriented battle system. But the game also improved upon the formula with a wider variety of environments, more uses for weapons outside of combat, and occasional mech-versus-mech battles.

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SNAP *of the* WHIP

With LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures, Traveller's Tales and LucasArts bring the blocky exploits of the globetrotting, whip-toting snakephobic archaeologist to Wii and DS.

BY JUSTIN CHENG

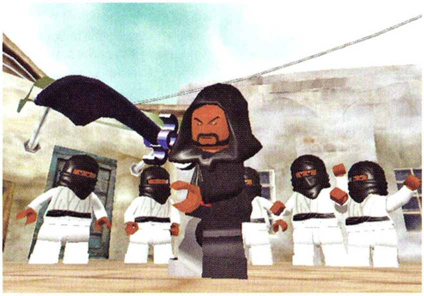
With the huge success of LEGO Star Wars, it seems only natural to LEGO-ize another popular film property. That's why when LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures was announced, we weren't exactly surprised, but we were certainly excited. Just seeing the iconic fedora and hearing the epic John Williams score in the Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull trailer is enough to psych up longtime fans, so being given the opportunity to play through all three of Indy's original adventures is instantly appealing.

Gamers who unlocked Indy in LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga already got a brief taste of LEGO Indiana Jones, but don't expect Indy's adventure to be exactly the same. The game does have the familiar two-player co-op and pick-up-and-play controls: move around with the Control Stick, and press A to jump, B to melee-attack, Z to interact with your environment, and C to swap characters. (Thankfully, unlike in the LEGO Star Wars games, you don't have to be facing the other characters to switch.) Motion controls are back, with a few twists. For instance, by moving the Wii remote and nunchuk up and down quickly, you can build objects faster. Kellam Eanes, associate producer at LucasArts, tells us, “The 'fast build' motion for the Wii remote from LEGO Star Wars was the surprise hit at focus testing and we definitely wanted to keep that in the game. But, hey, we all wanted more, so we've also included new features, like turning cranks, digging, and your own personal Swiss Army knife, the whip.”

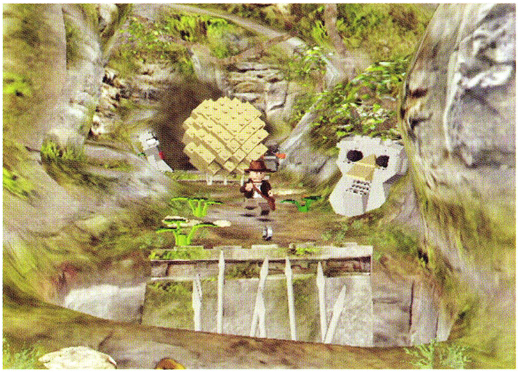
“THROW ME THE IDOL, I THROW YOU THE WHIP.”

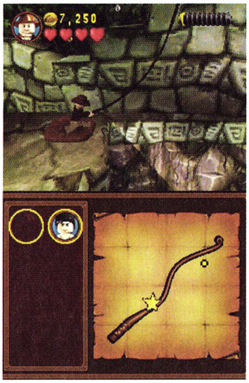
Using the whip is one of the most gratifying aspects of the game. Flick the Wii remote like a whip, and you'll hear a whip crack come from the Wii remote's speaker. It almost makes you feel like you're Indiana Jones himself. “LEGO Indy's whip is a varied and valuable tool,” Eanes says. “[You can] use the whip to swing across gaps and pull objects and enemies towards you.” I spent the first few minutes of playing the game just whipping my surroundings—surroundings that, unlike the environments in LEGO Star Wars, were more organic than blocky. (Appropriate given that I was in the Peruvian jungle.) Eanes tells us, “Indiana Jones is all about adventures in exotic locations, so we wanted LEGO Indy and his companions to enjoy the same kind of scenic experience.” And that experience is an engaging one: “Everything players can interact with directly or build will be made out of LEGO. Marion and Indy can throw LEGO chairs and bottles at Colonel Toht and his goons in a realistic-feeling Café Raven setting.”

There are more playable characters than Marion and Indy, of course—60 in all, in fact—and you'll have to use their unique skills to progress through the adventure. “When playing a mechanic character, you can utilize the Wii remote to turn a wrench and fix machinery. For example, in Raiders of the Lost Ark, your pilot Jock has to fix the plane in a hurry to escape the attacking tribesmen. Excavation characters, like Satipo or Sallah, can use the Wii remote to dig up special build-its and artifacts. All characters can turn cranks and fast-build, although

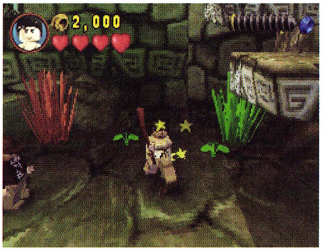


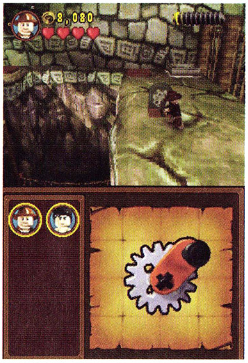
Like LEGO Star Wars, there are plenty of widgets to collect, with some changes. For example, the minikits are now artifacts you'd see in the films, such as the fertility idol from the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

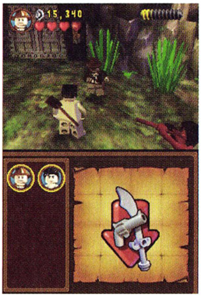




[Below] Indy can carry a whole lot of stuff, such as torches to ignite dynamite and guns and swords to dispatch baddies.







[Right] Rotate the crank with your stylus to help your buddy get across the pit.

you might have to rely on certain companion-character abilities to find the keys to the cranks." Mimic the real-life motion, and your onscreen character will start digging or cranking. Beyond that, most everyone can swim and grapple ledges, and female characters can double-jump, which is always a useful skill.

"HANG ON, LADY— WE GO FOR A RIDE."

Part of the charm of LEGO Star Wars was that it re-enacted all of the most memorable moments in LEGO style. LEGO Indiana Jones continues this trend: "Our goal was to capture all of the classic moments that come to mind when you think Indiana Jones," Eanes says. "LEGO Indy will run from a giant boulder, ride the fast-paced mine-car chase, and choose the correct Holy Grail in the Canyon of the Crescent Moon.... We are telling the story in a whole new way, with a truly LEGO twist."

The Indiana Jones films are filled with such adventurous moments, but they're not always appropriate for all ages. Take Temple of Doom and its heart-removal scene. "As an adult, who doesn't want to see this?" Eanes asks. "However, we had to keep younger players in mind. So, no 'Kali Ma' of the heart. We of course keep it lighthearted—pardon the pun—and comedic to ensure no LEGO nightmares." Based on the delightfully charming cinematics we saw for Raiders of the Lost Ark—including one where Indy's at Barnett College (which is also the hub world for the game) talking about the Ark of the Covenant to the government agents with grunts and mumbles—we say they've succeeded in that department.

"NAZIS. I HATE THESE GUYS."

Another thing you won't see besides the "Kali Ma" of the heart is Nazis, which may perplex gamers who grew up watching the films. Eanes offered an explanation: "It's a kid's game, and honestly, in the telling of the story in the game, it is not a key element. We are including plenty of sinister-looking bad guys to keep with the storyline, and rest assured, you'll see a pseudo-melting of Colonel Toht and his minions at the opening of the Ark."

Despite the Nazis' absence, you'll still encounter a wide variety of enemies, such as giant spiders. Sure, the tarantulas at the beginning of Raiders of the Lost Ark were pretty big, but the ones in the game are human-sized. Indy has no problem dispatching the arachnids, but the treacherous Satipo is terrified, leaving Indy to fend for himself. This is just one example of the game's fear mechanic: Indy hates snakes, and if he encounters one, he'll be running around in fright and won't be able to fight it. And while Indy's dad, Henry Sr., can use his umbrella to scare the birds in *The Last Crusade*, he's frightened of the rats in this game.

"DON'T CALL ME JUNIOR."

Most everything, including every cut-scene, is the same in the DS version of the game, but with a heavy emphasis on utilizing all the handheld has to offer. In addition to using the touch screen for whipping, digging, etc., LEGO Indiana Jones on DS makes use of the microphone. Eanes shares, "Players can blow out torches to reveal hidden areas, and inflate up rafts to get across rivers simply by blowing into the microphone." Just walk over to a torch and blow into the microphone when the icon pops up.

The most significant difference between the two game versions is the DS title's touch-screen minigames. "Based on one of the signature moments from Raiders of the Lost Ark, you can guide LEGO Indy with the stylus or your thumb as he clings on to the back of a German truck with his whip," Eanes tells us. "The exciting river rapids and mine-cart scenes from Temple of Doom inspired minigames in which you dodge obstacles as well as guide your cart through perilous tracks in the mines, challenging your touch-screen skills." And in a nod to the Fear Factor-esque dinner scene in Temple of Doom, there's also a minigame involving chilled monkey brains. "Who doesn't love chilled monkey brains?" exclaims Eanes. "You have to move them, freeze them, and move them back, all with the stylus!" There are minigames outside of the main campaign, too, such as one that has you shoving studs, shuffleboard-style.

It seems that both games are filled with surprises. We hope to discover them all when both the Wii and DS versions of LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures are released in June.

GUEST STAR

Since Indy made a cameo in LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga, can we expect a *Star Wars* cameo in LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adevntures? "There's at least one LEGO Star Wars cameo in this adventure," Eanes admits. "I'm not going to give everything away, though. You'll have to play the game in June to find out!"

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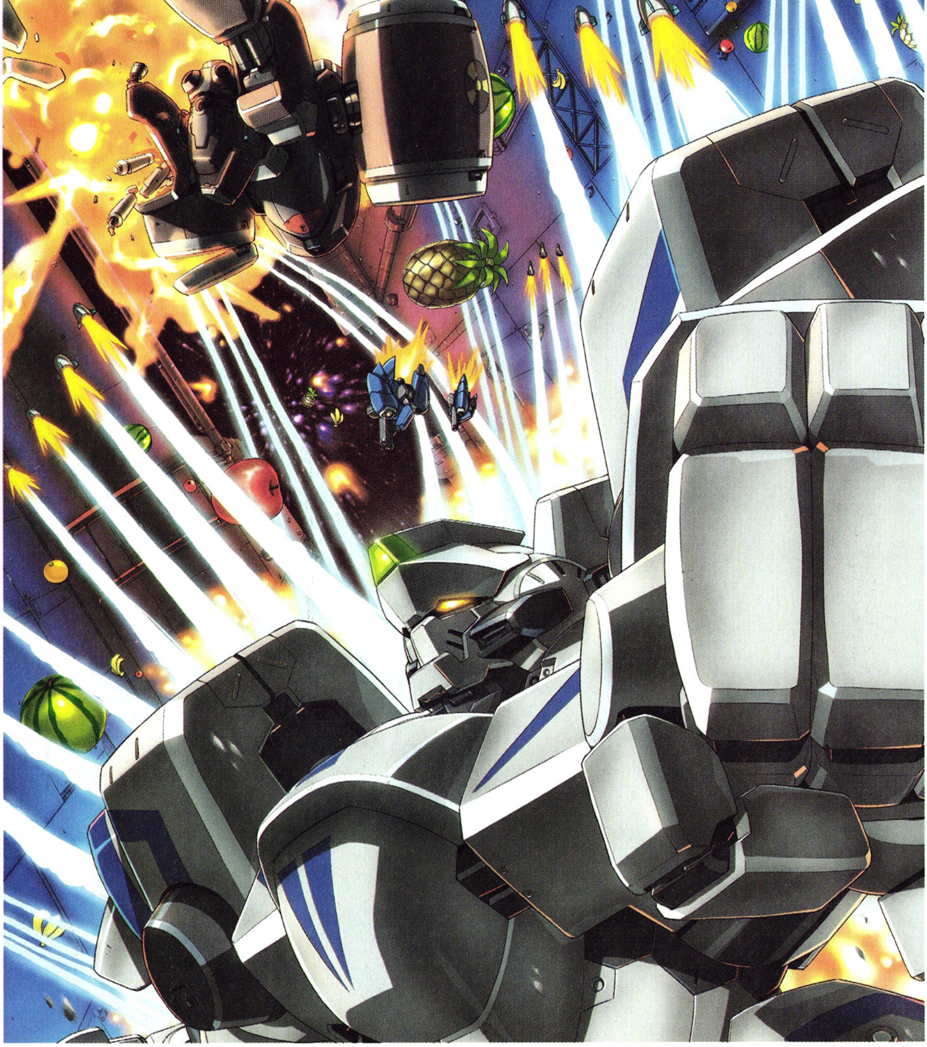
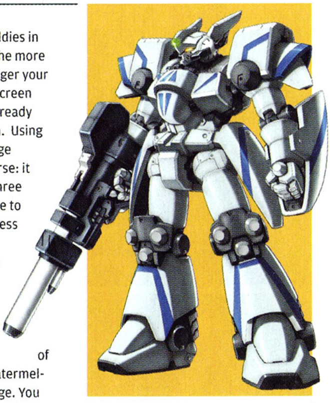


DISCOVER THE SPIRIT

Missiles, explosions, and fruit galore—Treasure's hardcore shooter franchise returns with **Bangai-O Spirits** on DS. BY JUSTIN CHENG

When the original Bangai-O was released in North America on the Sega Dreamcast seven years ago, there was little fanfare—at least as far as mainstream audiences were concerned. Die-hard fans of developer Treasure, however, were in heaven with the quirky and often challenging shooter. Now Treasure—with the help of publisher D3PA—is bringing a retooled and reimagined Bangai-O to the DS with a host of new stuff that takes advantage of the handheld's unique features.

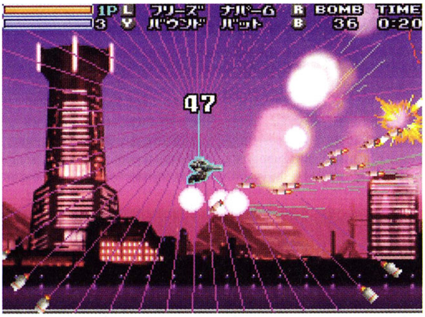


When we got our hands on Bangai-O Spirits, we immediately noticed the gameplay tweaks. In the original game, you had the option to move and shoot independently (shoot right while moving left, for example) by using the Control Stick to move and the face buttons to shoot up, down, left, and right. This new Bangai-O is more straightforward: you shoot and move in the same direction. It's a trade-off for having quick access to the primary and secondary weapons that you choose before each of the 150-plus levels (all of which are available from the start). You can assign, say, homing missiles to the B Button and a sword to the Y Button—the homing missiles are great for open areas because they're fire-and-forget weapons, while the sword is ideal for smaller corridors because it allows you move forward while destroying enemy missiles. Naturally, there are more tools in your arsenal than just those: we also played with Break Missiles that pierce through certain walls and enemy missiles, a bat (yes, a giant baseball bat) that you can use to hit back missiles, and napalm that sets enemies ablaze while shielding you if you stand in the middle of the inferno. Even better, certain projectile weapons can be mixed to make such beauties as napalm homing missiles—though that means you'll have to make do without a melee weapon.

You also have omnidirectional EX attacks in your arsenal. You fire off missiles that can clear out almost all of the baddies in the surrounding area. The more danger you're in, the larger your missiles get, filling the screen and ratcheting up the already insane amount of action. Using this screen-filling barrage comes at a price, of course: it consumes one of your three EX attacks, so you'll have to use them sparingly—unless the enemies drop fruit, that is. Pick up the giant pieces of fruit to refill your EX gauge. As in real life, fruit is good for you—pick up the giant pieces of apples, oranges, and watermelons to refill your EX gauge. You wouldn't think the giant robot you're piloting would need to eat, but, this is a Treasure game; it doesn't have to make sense..

LEVEL-MINDED

Too bad the fruit doesn't replenish your health because Bangai-O Spirits is not an easy game by any means. Most players would probably get destroyed within mere seconds if they were to jump right in to the later levels.



It can be humbling to find out that your skills aren't quite up to snuff for this game, but like many old-school shooters, it drives you to try, try again until you succeed. Fortunately for those who prefer thought-provoking challenges to straight-up action, there are some puzzle levels, too: One level consists of boxes that you have to move into specific points using your dash (the A Button). Another stage is designed like a pinball table, where you dash upward to knock balls onto the table, using them to destroy all of the targets.

As creative as the aforementioned levels are, though, they're nothing compared to what you

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152
TIME
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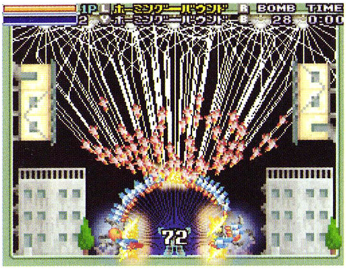
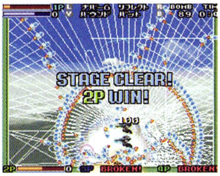
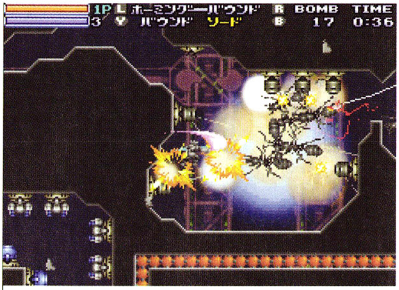
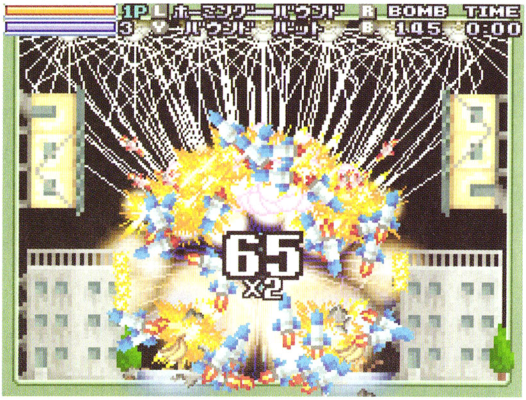


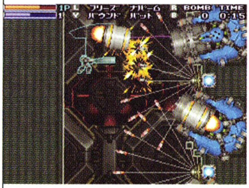
[Below] With two players, it looks like the action gets pretty crazy. [Right] Whoever wins...well, Bangai-O wins, I guess.



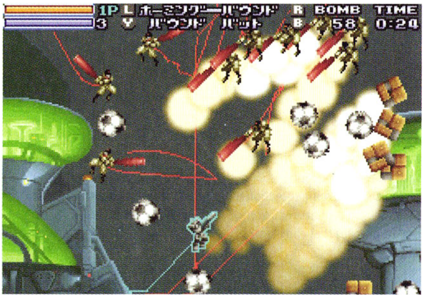
1P
BOMB
3
TIME







Ants, missiles, baseball bats, and soccer balls—everything's bigger in Bangai-O Spirits.

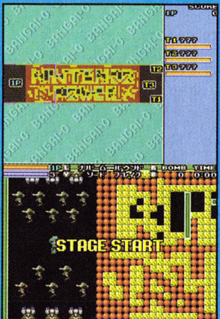


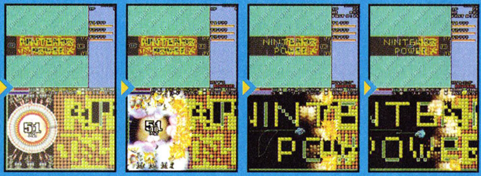
can make with Bangai-O Spirits' level editor. You can ease into the idea by editing one of the game's pre-existing levels, adding or removing enemies, or changing the position of walls and floors. Better still, you can build an entirely new level, using the stylus to draw platforms and place a spawn point, enemies, and objects. If you like a specific aspect of the premade levels, you can copy and paste it into your own. You can make giant walls by using the drawing tool (much like an illustration program on a PC), or increase the size of your opponents, thus making them stronger, to make your level even more challenging (you know, if you're a masochist).

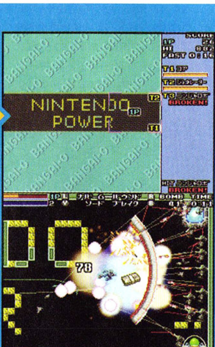
SHARING IS CARING

You'll want to share your custom levels, of course. Spirits supports level sharing, but not in the way you might expect. Instead of using the DS's local wireless functionality, Bangai-O Spirits uses what the developers call Sound Load technology, which converts your levels into sound. Simply put your DS's speaker up to the microphone on your friend's DS and press Play to send your level. If you have a PC with a sound-recording program and a microphone, you can play the sound from your DS and record it on your PC, then host that recorded sound file on a website or email it to your friends. Replays can also be transmitted this way, so you can prove to others that you really did beat that tough-as-nails level in a short amount of time.

The DS's wireless capabilities do come into play when you compete with up to three friends, though publisher D3PA remains tight-lipped on the subject. We'll bring you more details when we get to play the game again. And we're certainly looking forward to that—it will make the wait till Bangai-O Spirits' Spring 2008 release a bit more bearable.







POWER BUILDER

When D3PA came by with Bangai-O Spirits, they had a special surprise for us: a custom-made Nintendo Power level. By using your EX attack at the beginning of the level, you set off an explosive chain reaction that reveals the words "Nintendo Power" in the top screen.

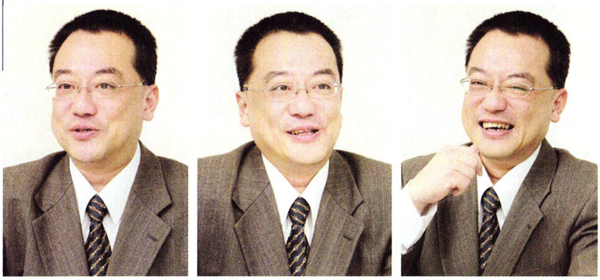
SPIRITED CONVERSATION

We chat with Treasure's president Masato Maegawa about the process of bringing Bangai-O back and updating it for a new audience.

NINTENDO POWER **Why have you decided to bring Bangai-O back after all these years? (Not that we're complaining!)**
MASATO MAEGAWA To tell you straightforwardly, we just wanted to make it. In our previous version we grasped a sense of what people liked, and felt that it had a great possibility for us to broaden the Bangai-O franchise.

What makes Bangai-O a good fit for the DS?
The hardware is optimal for 2-D graphics. Also, the level-editor feature, which we felt was an important feature and selling point, was most suitable for the DS since it utilizes the stylus.

Is the same team who worked on the original Bangai-O handling development for Bangai-O Spirits?
The director, who is also the main programmer, is the same from the original title. Out of the eight [main people on] this project, five have worked on the previous game including me, so it is safe to say that we are from the same original team.



What was your overarching approach to creating this follow-up? What did you want to achieve that you weren't able to with the original game?
For the follow-up we concentrated on the following three things: to increase the types of enemies and weapons, and the number of stages; the inclusion of the level editor function; and the ability to share levels.

Using sound files to transfer user-created stages is brilliant. Where did the idea come from?
During the 1980s we used to play around with PCs. Sharing sound files was the old-school method of storing data, and the idea was simple to grasp. The fact that we are able to transfer user-created stages in the mass-appeal format of the MP3 we feel is quite revolutionary, since it can be easier for players than using Wi-Fi and having to find friend codes and passwords.

In the original game, players could use the four face buttons to shoot in the corresponding direction. During our hands-on with the DS title, there was just a single button for shooting straight ahead. Will there be an option to switch to the old control scheme, and if not, what's the reason for this change?
This time we do not have the four face buttons that shoot in eight different directions. This time we went through the process of trial and error to settle down to what would be the easiest to play with in terms of control.

The number of projectiles flying around on-screen is insane. How did you manage to squeeze so much out of the DS, especially during four-player games?
Our whole concept is to have hundreds of rounds of missiles so we are pushing it to the limit in terms of programming as well as DS hardware. Ultimately, we bypassed the issues of processing speed and the small screen and moved forward so that we would not limit the number of missiles, enemies, and explosions.

Speaking of the four-player mode, why was that something the team wanted to implement for this new game?
Multiplayer on the DS is really beneficial. From the beginning of development we made a decision to make this game multiplayer. The reason for this is because the DS hardware is suitable since it allows each individual player to be in control of their own screens.

It's our understanding that Bangai-O Spirits will include at least double the number of stages found in the original game. What should series fans expect from these new offerings?
Please anticipate the number of stages to have multiplied close to four times. We are introducing 160 stages! What's a bit different from our previous game is that we have adjusted the new game to have fewer long and hard-to-beat levels. We felt that we wanted to incorporate a large amount of concept-conscious levels that are simple and interesting that can be picked up and played, even if it were just 30 minutes a day, or gamers can play for many hours at a time if they choose.

It seems somewhat peculiar to us that you collect fruit in a game about giant robots firing dozens of missiles at each other. What is the origin of that concept?
Based on old-school games and gamers, they would find nothing strange about this. During the 1980s gaming era, fruits were items that were quite common!

When it comes to shooters, Treasure is one of the most celebrated development teams in the industry. What's your philosophy for the genre, and what do you like about shooters?
Shooter games are full of gaming basics, which are very exciting to us! Sweaty palms and the tension we experience when trying to get away from the enemy while attempting to beat it is something that cannot be experienced in an RPG or other types of games.

We feel fortunate that we've seen follow-ups to some of our favorite Treasure titles recently, including Gunstar Heroes and now Bangai-O. For a long time, the studio shied away from doing sequels. Is there any particular reason you've been revisiting some of your classic franchises recently?
There is no specific reason. There is no policy that we will not be making sequels to our games. If a person on the development side says that they want to create a game, we plan and move in that direction.

Last time we spoke, you mentioned that the team was starting to work with Wii. Can you give us any hints as to what you might have in store for the console? Please?
Currently, we are in the process of developing two Wii titles. I am not able to share with you the details of the games, but both are titles that have a lot of impact, so please anticipate the announcement that will be coming out this year.

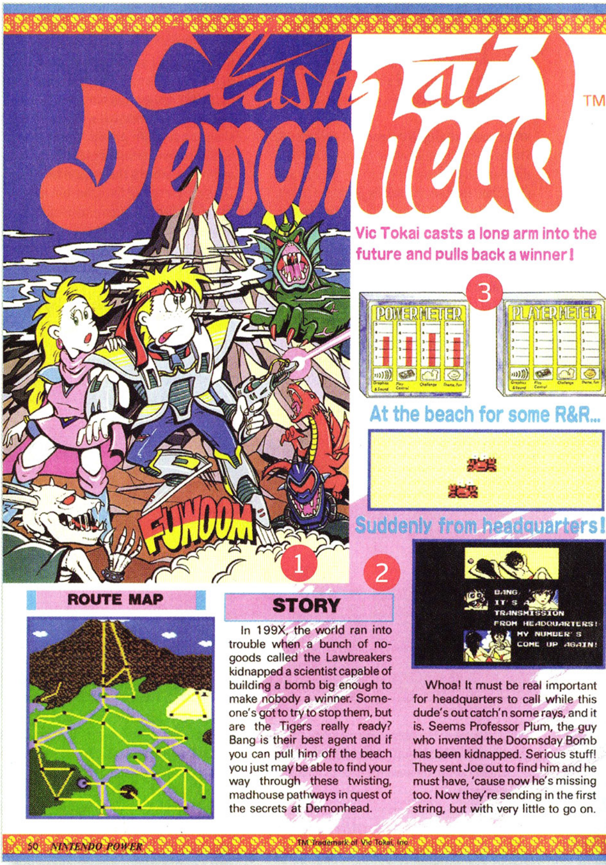
Since you're doing Ikaruga for Xbox Live Arcade, do you have any plans or interest in doing projects for WiiWare?
We haven't scheduled any projects at this stage, but we are interested and will be examining future prospects.

NP By Design

AS A WRITER AND EDITOR, I naturally consider the written word to be the heart and soul of any magazine article, but the truth is that most people are drawn to a page's visual elements before they dig down to the real content. What you see on the page—screenshots, photos, character art, fonts, color choices, backgrounds, special info boxes, even the seemingly simple lines and bars carving up the page—are all pieces of the puzzle facing graphic designers. The choices are endless. But when smart choices are made, each design element adds to the reader's enjoyment and understanding of the article. Nintendo Power's design philosophy has shifted dramatically over the course of its 20 years; in fact, Nintendo Power's metamorphosis from the original Japanese-style fanzine to today's mainstream, Western-style periodical may represent one of the greatest magazine-design shifts in publishing history. This month we look skin-deep to focus on examples of four "design periods" in the life of our favorite mag. **BY SCOTT PELLAND**

The Tokyo Period ▶

Every inch of the page (like this example from the May/June 1989 issue) was packed with copy and art presented in a breathless rush of information. Is there anything that NP's initial design crew didn't cover? Contrary to current design dogma, the presence of white space was regarded as a failure of the imagination by the original team.



Clash at Demonhead™

Vic Tokai casts a long arm into the future and pulls back a winner!

At the beach for some R&R...

Suddenly from headquarters!

BANG, IT'S A TRANSMISSION FROM HEADQUARTERS!

MY NUMBER'S COME UP AGAIN!

STORY

In 199X, the world ran into trouble when a bunch of no-goods called the Lawbreakers kidnapped a scientist capable of building a bomb big enough to make nobody a winner. Someone's got to try to stop them, but are the Tigers really ready? Bang is their best agent and if you can pull him off the beach you just may be able to find your way through these twisting, madhouse pathways in quest of the secrets at Demonhead.

Whoa! It must be real important for headquarters to call while this dude's out catch'n some rays, and it is. Seems Professor Plum, the guy who invented the Doomsday Bomb has been kidnapped. Serious stuff! They sent Joe out to find him and he must have, 'cause now he's missing too. Now they're sending in the first string, but with very little to go on.

50 NINTENDO POWER

TM Trademark of Vic Tokai, Inc.

1 Colorful comic art set the scene with more impact than you'd get with 1,000 words, unless you chose one as meaning-packed as, "FUWOOM!"

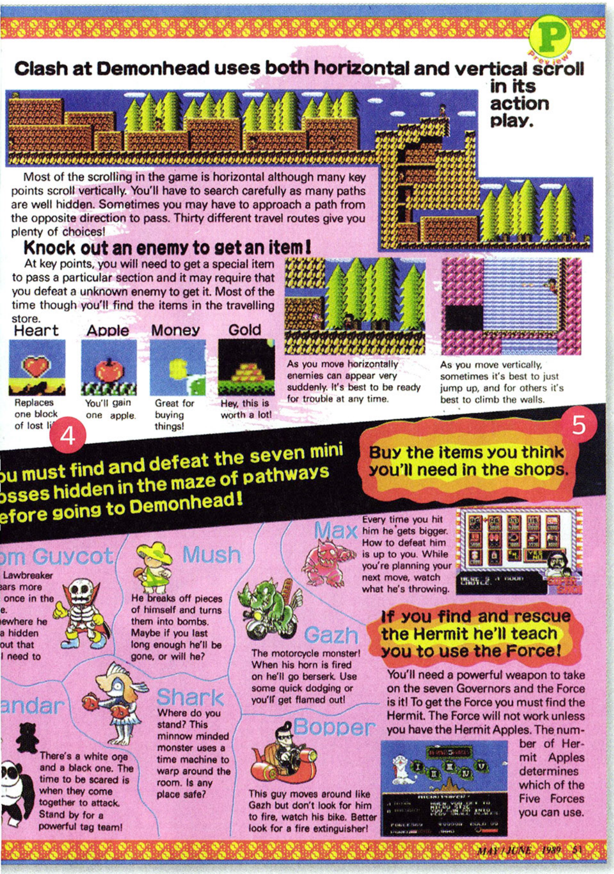
2 Big splats and smears of color, primarily mucousy greens, pinks, and yellows, adorned the backgrounds of many pages. Printing error perhaps? Some sort of toxic-chemical reaction? Whenever we asked the designers about it, they turned away and spat in disgust. We never figured it out.

3 NP's first rating system ranked games in four categories on a scale of one to five. If I were to rate the design of these pages today, I'd be generous to give them a two, but in 1989 they were a definite four!

4 Teeny-weenie caption spaces were great if you used Japanese characters, but squeezing in English words was a challenge worthy of a linguistic Houdini.

OF NINTENDO POWER

#5 IN OUR YEARLONG CELEBRATION OF NINTENDO POWER'S CLASSIC MOMENTS



P Previews

Clash at Demonhead uses both horizontal and vertical scroll in its action play.

Most of the scrolling in the game is horizontal although many key points scroll vertically. You'll have to search carefully as many paths are well hidden. Sometimes you may have to approach a path from the opposite direction to pass. Thirty different travel routes give you plenty of choices!

Knock out an enemy to get an item!

At key points, you will need to get a special item to pass a particular section and it may require that you defeat a unknown enemy to get it. Most of the time though you'll find the items in the travelling store.

Heart	Apple	Money	Gold
Replaces one block of lost li	You'll gain one apple.	Great for buying things!	Hey, this is worth a lot!

As you move horizontally enemies can appear very suddenly. It's best to be ready for trouble at any time.

As you move vertically, sometimes it's best to just jump up, and for others it's best to climb the walls.

4

ou must find and defeat the seven mini osses hidden in the maze of pathways efore going to Demonhead!

5

Buy the items you think you'll need in the shops.

om Guycot

Lawbreaker ears more once in the e. ewhere he a hidden out that l need to

Mush

He breaks off pieces of himself and turns them into bombs. Maybe if you last long enough he'll be gone, or will he?

Max

Every time you hit him he gets bigger. How to defeat him is up to you. While you're planning your next move, watch what he's throwing.

Gazh

The motorcycle monster! When his horn is fired on he'll go berserk. Use some quick dodging or you'll get flamed out!

andar

There's a white one and a black one. The time to be scared is when they come together to attack. Stand by for a powerful tag team!

Shark

Where do you stand? This minnow minded monster uses a time machine to warp around the room. Is any place safe?

Bopper

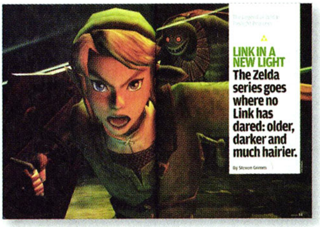
This guy moves around like Gazh but don't look for him to fire, watch his bike. Better look for a fire extinguisher!

If you find and rescue the Hermit he'll teach you to use the Force!

You'll need a powerful weapon to take on the seven Governors and the Force is it! To get the Force you must find the Hermit. The Force will not work unless you have the Hermit Apples. The number of Hermit Apples determines which of the Five Forces you can use.

MAY/JUNE 1989 61

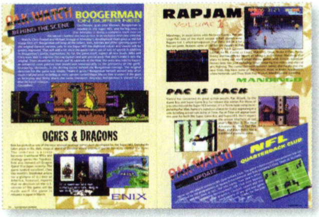
5 Nothing says, "Look at me! I'm important!" like tilted text and bright colors. And if one color is good, three colors must be stupendous!



LINK IN A NEW LIGHT The Zelda series goes where no Link has dared: older, darker and much hairier.

The Modern Period ▲

Inspired by the grunge movement in music, and risk-taking magazines such as *Wired* and *Ray Gun*, NP boldly dove into its first official redesign. Most notable was the shift to a darker, richer color palette, prerendered 3-D graphic elements, and a staggering array of headline fonts (like the 15 shown in this Pak Watch example from Volume 68) to ensure maximum coolness and confusion.



PAK WATCH BEHIND THE SCENE

BOOGERMAN ON SUPER NES

RAPJAM VOLUME 1

MANDINGO

PAC IS BACK

OGRES & DRAGONS

ENIX

PAK WATCH UPDATE

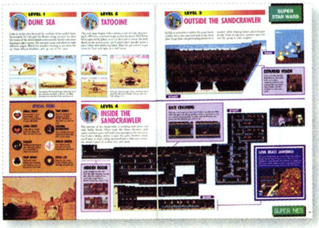
NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB

The Play It Loud Period ▲

With seasoned-pro designers on the job, NP went through the fires of rebirth and emerged with a clean, smart, aged-up appearance in July 2005 (Volume 193) that positioned it for the 21st century and today's more sophisticated gamer.

The Box Period ▶

The wild and chaotic frontier days of early NP design had been reined in by the time this Super Star Wars feature ran in Volume 42. The new design motto was, "If you can't wedge it into a nice, neat box, forget about it."



LEVEL 1 DUNE SEA

LEVEL 2 TATOOINE

LEVEL 3 OUTSIDE THE SANDCRAWLER

SUPER STAR WARS

SPECIAL ITEMS

LEVEL 4 INSIDE THE SANDCRAWLER

EXPANDED VISION

GATE CRASHING

HIDDEN ROOM

LAVA BEAST JAWENKO

SUPER NES

KART BLANCHE

Climb Behind the Wheel of Mario Kart Wii

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NINTENDO POWER SWEEPSTAKES
MAY 2008

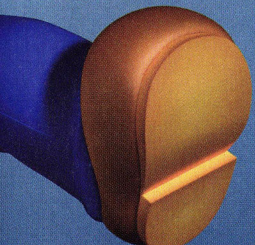
GRAND PRIZE

10 WINNERS!
Ten lucky winners will take the checkered flag in this month's sweepstakes and receive a copy of Mario Kart® Wii and the Wii Wheel™. You could be one of them!

Wii
MARIOKART Wii
MARIOKART Wii
Nintendo

SECOND PRIZE

20 WINNERS!
Coming in second isn't so bad when you drive away with the Wii Wheel™ (Wii remote sold separately). Hey, would we steer you wrong?



TO ENTER: Send us a postcard listing your full name, mailing address, phone number, and email address (if you have one). Address it as follows:

Nintendo Power Sweepstakes v228
c/o Future US
1000 Marina Blvd., STE 510
Brisbane, CA 94005

OFFICIAL RULES

1. No purchase is necessary to win and as a contestant you have not yet won. Entries must be received no later than June 1, 2008. The winners will be chosen on or about June 17, 2008, and will be notified by e-mail (or regular mail). The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. The sponsor of the contest is Future US, Inc. ("Future US"), 1000 Marina Blvd., STE 510 Brisbane, CA 94005. Future US cannot be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries, nor shall it be liable for unsuccessful efforts to notify a winner.

2. The prizes are the following: The prize that is available for ten (10) contestant is one retail copy of the Mario Kart® Wii software with Wii Wheel™ bundle (of which the MSRP is $49.99 each). The prize that is available for twenty (20) contestants is one Wii Wheel™ (of which the MSRP is $9.99 each). The prizes are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed.

3. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries and the decision of Future US shall be final. You may obtain the name of the winner by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the address above. Future US reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to cancel or suspend this drawing should causes beyond its control corrupt the administration, security, or proper play of the drawing.

4. It is not necessary to buy Nintendo Power magazine to become a contestant. Everyone who mails in an entry will be considered as participants.

5. Entrants must be at least 13 years of age. If a winner is a minor, the prize will be awarded in the name of winner's parent or legal guardian, who is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state and local taxes, and that winner must also provide a signed parental or guardian consent form, provided by the sponsor, within 7 days of notification attempt. Failure of the minor to return the guardian consent form will result in the forfeiture of the prize and selection of an alternate winner, who will be chosen through a random drawing from the remaining eligible entries.

6. Return of any prize or prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected.

7. The winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. By acceptance of the prize, the winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Winners are responsible for paying any income taxes on the value of the prize received.

8. Future US is not responsible for any damages or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this contest or the receipt of any prize. In addition, contestants release and hold Future US and its employees harmless from any and all damages and claims of any kind in connection with the contest. Future US reserves the right to confirm all winners for eligibility and compliance with the rules and regulations.

9. This contest is open to residents of the United States only. Void in Vermont, Rhode Island, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law.

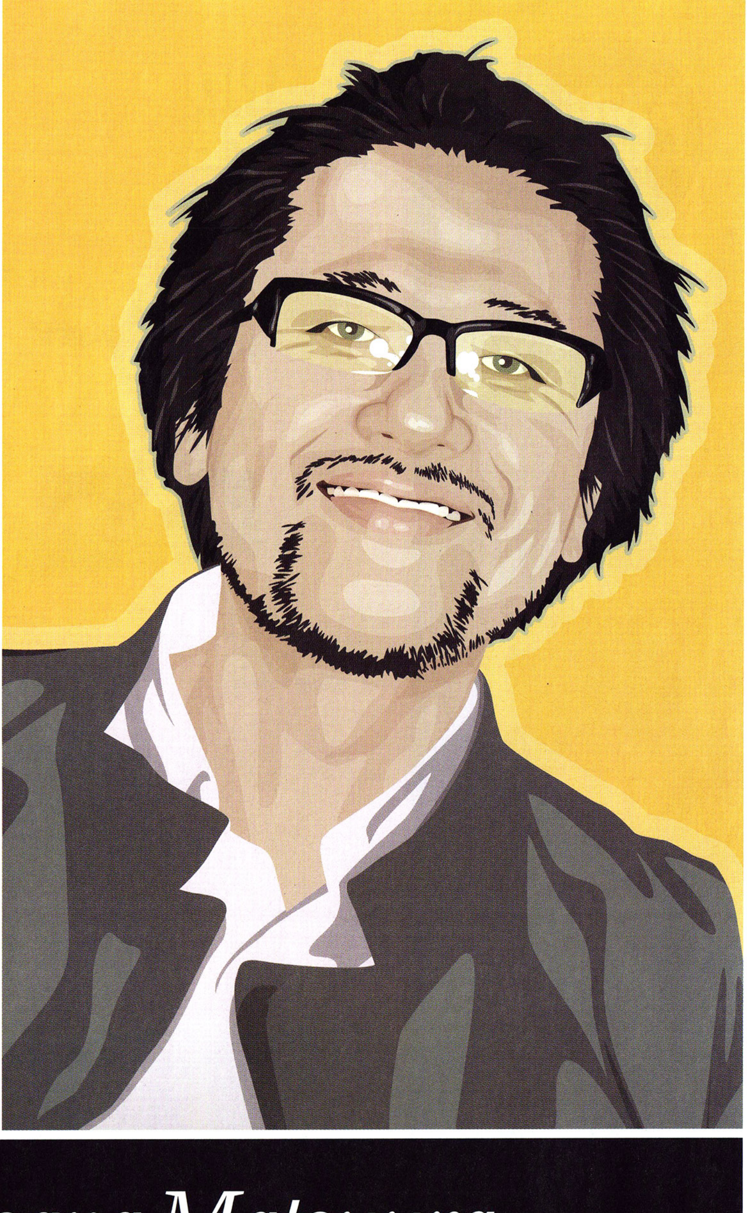
10. Employees, officers, and directors of Future US, the publisher or their subsidiaries and affiliated companies, and their immediate families and those living in their households, are not eligible.

11. A contestant may enter by printing their name, address, daytime telephone number and e-mail address (if they have one) and the name of the prize drawing on a 3 x 5 card and mailing it to: Nintendo Power Sweepstakes v228, c/o Future US, 1000 Marina Blvd., STE 510 Brisbane, CA 94005. Only one entry per person will be accepted.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Comic Mischief

13

Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
June 6, 1961

BIRTHPLACE
Osaka, Japan

POSITION
President of NanaOn-Sha

BEST KNOWN FOR
Popularizing rhythm games, convincing gamers they gotta believe

FAVORITE FOOD
Vichyssoise

CURRENT PROJECTS
Major Minor's Majestic March, other unrevealed projects

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Masaya Matsuura

Rhythm games probably existed before Masaya Matsuura appeared on the gaming scene, but if they did, they weren't nearly as significant or popular as they are now. When the musician-turned-game-producer teamed up with artist Rodney Alan Greenblat to create the addictive, innovative, and outright charming PaRappa the Rapper in the late 1990s, he brought music gaming to the masses. PaRappa not only proved that rap could go beyond stereotypical norms, but also helped establish a genre that paved the way for the likes of Elite Beat Agents and the Guitar Hero series. Matsuura continued to break new ground in both music and gameplay with each subsequent release, and late this year he'll be bringing his magic to Wii with Major Minor's Majestic March. No matter what he's working on, Matsuura always aims to innovate and put smiles on players' faces.

NINTENDO POWER
When did you become interested in music? How did that evolve into a career for you?

MASAYA MATSUURA
There were a number of things that influenced this, but I guess what originally triggered my interest in performing music was when my family moved when I was in fourth grade. Obviously I didn't know anyone at first. On cold winter days, rather than playing outside, the girls would stay in the classroom and line up in turn to play the foot-pump organ. Girls who already had some skill would act as mentors for the beginners. I was so fascinated I thought I would burst! One day, I entered the classroom when no one else was around and headed for the organ. I was so absorbed that I had no sense of time passing.

Thereafter, my relationship with music was influenced by intriguing music introduced to me by friends, and the encouragement from older students regarding the difficulties of actually working in music helped to bolster my confidence moving forward. Up until just before I graduated university I wasn't contemplating a career in music. The fact that I did is thanks to the encouragement given to me by my mentors, and for that I owe them my thanks.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
I really believed that I would work at a trade company just like my father.

What instruments do you play, and which is your favorite?
I've played keyboard in most of my musical performances thus far. Even now, it's the instrument that I play the most. At home, I play guitar (electric and acoustic) liberally and often, but I also play drums and trumpet from time to time. I can't play all instruments, but neither are there any that I dislike.

What was it like when you were in the band PSY-S? How has your musical style evolved since then?
The routine was generally releasing albums annually then touring. It was like that for 10 years. It always made me happy when people bought our CDs and told me that they liked it; this was enough to drive me on. I guess the biggest change was when I started thinking about games—new areas of exploration became possible that previously weren't. Thinking independently of games, perhaps my biggest developments have been to look again at '70s-style music and increase my on-stage activities. My music career started in the age of '80s electronic music, but nowadays I'm more interested in the '70s style that preceded it—I think it suits me better because it is a style that conveys more positive mutual understanding than present music.

How did you become interested in interactive music? What inspired you to get into the video game business?
The repetitive issues inherent in creating computer music are what originally sparked my interest in interactive music. One day it dawned upon me that creative works weren't just about the end result, but there are also processes along the way, and I realized that

> *"Rather than just refining its current form, the game industry needs to start embracing talent from broader backgrounds to evolve."*

GAMEOGRAPHY

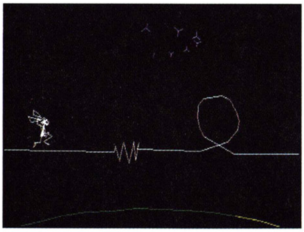
Infectious music and a whimsical visual style have been hallmarks of Matsuura's work for more than a decade. Although originally his games were exclusive to Sony systems, he's recently been branching out onto other hardware.

COOL
U rappin' GOOD !
BAD
AWFUL
SCORE 9
Step on the brakes!

PARAPPA THE RAPPER
1997, PLAYSTATION
PRODUCER, COMPOSER

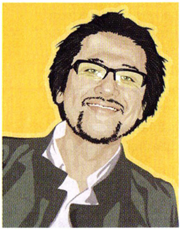
COOL
GOOD
BAD
AWFUL
184
OK! Gotta move on!

UM JAMMER LAMMY
1999, PLAYSTATION
PRODUCER, COMPOSER



VIB-RIBBON
1999, PLAYSTATION
PRODUCER, COMPOSER

Power Profiles



it would be interesting to use these elements in a way where they could be introduced at will through a performance. As a result of this, I started to think about the player's experience itself being the creative work. This eventually led to PaRappa the Rapper, although at the time I wasn't aware that this concept was a video game per se. Therefore, I guess the answer to your question is that it was originally the people who bought PaRappa who led me into the video game business!

What other types of projects do you work on outside of video games?
Until quite recently we worked on Sony's entertainment robot Aibo. It was very challenging work, but it was inspiring. I've also been helping long-term NanaOn-Sha staff to set up their own companies.

Are video games your preferred medium to work with?
I believe that games are an interesting way for a large number of people to enjoy stimulating challenges, but I think that we still have a long way to go. Rather than just refining its current form, the game industry needs to start embracing talent from broader backgrounds to evolve. On the other hand, I expect to see other industries embracing game expressions and other resources growing in importance.

I understand you're interested in the concept of communication. How does that affect the games you make?
When music requires more than simply listening to be complete, the process itself becomes the product's expression—communication is an inseparable element. In particular, whenever I make games from my heart I'm always trying to provoke happy, positive emotions via gameplay.

What's the process like creating a music game?
In PaRappa's case, the original idea was merely to have music as the core element where pressing the button would make a human voice play. It wasn't until later that we decided to focus on rapping. From there the necessary interaction started to form in our minds. Sometimes these kinds of ideas lead to games and sometimes they lead to other things.

How did you begin your collaboration with Rodney Alan Greenblat?
Back at the start of PaRappa's development, I was contracted to Sony Music as an artist, and at the time Rodney also had a contract with Sony Creative. When the idea for PaRappa came to fruition, we thought that Rodney would be an ideal match for the character designs, so a member of the staff introduced us.

What about his work appeals to you? What makes his art a good match for your games?
Just seeing Rodney's designs makes you smile. I'm always trying to make my work appeal to all ages and genders, so Rodney's work is very advantageous in this respect.

How does the collaborative process work? For example, who decided to make PaRappa a dog or to create a martial-arts onion?
I don't think that "decide" is a good way to describe the process of how things take shape.

The majority of what I do is merely to raise issues when I think that things are going in an inappropriate direction which sometimes may necessitate a major redirection. On the other hand, if I don't mention anything then we can assume there is no need for any amendments and thus it has already been decided.

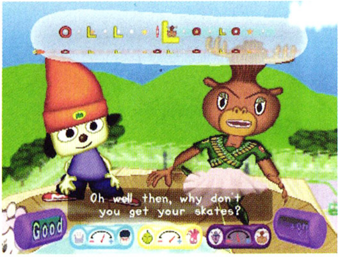
Many people feel that the rhythm-game genre really took hold with PaRappa. How does it feel to be credited for the popularity of the genre?
Simply delightful.

How has the video game industry changed during the time you've been involved with it?
Current games are obviously incomparable technically to games from that time, but regrettably it's a matter of fact that violent games are still too numerous.

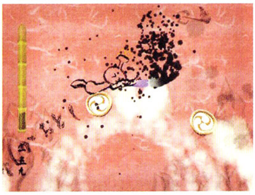
Do you have a particular favorite song you've composed?
That's a very difficult question to answer. Vaguely put, there are

> *"When music requires more than simply listening to be complete, the process itself becomes the product's expression—communication is an inseparable element."*

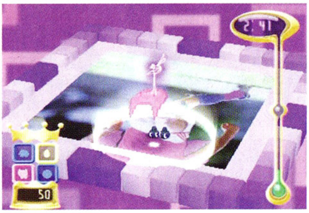
GAMEOGRAPHY



PARAPPA THE RAPPER 2
2002, PLAYSTATION 2
PRODUCER, COMPOSER



MOJIB-RIBBON
2004, PLAYSTATION 2
PRODUCER



VIB-RIPPLE
2004, PLAYSTATION 2
PRODUCER, COMPOSER

> *"Innovation comes from the piling up of little ideas that swell up and eventually change paradigms. I think that it takes a great effort to build up all these actual elements, no matter how small they seem."*

degrees between being pleased with a song, and then after a long period of time passes, feeling that areas of the song are incomplete and then not feeling pleased any more…but then when you think about people out there who love that song, one shouldn't come to dislike it, really.

What aspect of creating a game do you enjoy the most?
Every aspect is simultaneously both painful and enjoyable! [Laughs]

Your games are known for being innovative, but many publishers seem to be averse to trying new concepts. Do you think, in today's video game marketplace, a company would still take a risk with an unproven concept like PaRappa? Is there a secret to succeeding with an original idea?
It's often misconceived that an innovator, or an innovative product, conjures up fantastic ideas out of the blue. Innovation comes from the piling up of little ideas that swell up and eventually change paradigms. I think that it takes a great effort to build up all these actual elements, no matter how small they seem.

When you're stumped by a problem while creating a game or composing a tune, what's your process for working through it?
Putting time into it…putting in the effort to create an environment that enables this is crucial.

You've mentioned that you like the idea behind brain-training games. Have you given any more thought to putting your own spin on that genre?
Last year I made a game called Musika for the iPod. It is a relatively simple game where letters gradually appear onscreen in a variety of graphical effects, and if you think that that letter is also in the song's title then you press the button. The faster you guess correctly the more points you get; so as the letter gradually becomes clear the player needs to guess. I think that these kinds of cases are comparable to brain training.

What games do you play for fun? Are you more of a fan of Guitar Hero or Rock Band?
Lately I play Wii Sports, Flow [available for PS3 and PC], and such. Unfortunately neither Guitar Hero nor Rock Band has been released in Japan.

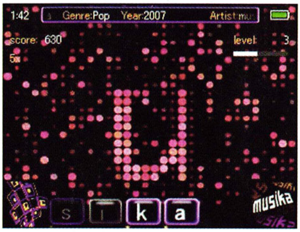
What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
Except for those who make violent games, I generally respect all game creators.

What are some of your favorite nongaming hobbies or pastimes? I understand you like dogs. How many do you have?
That's a painful question.… My pet dog passed away last November. She was a Japanese Chin called Cello. She lived for just five brief years. As for the reason behind the name, well, the breeder that we bought her from told us that even after she'd grown from a baby, she would always be petite. So we called her Cello in the hope that it would help inspire a little extra growth! She was hospitalized for her final six months, so I visited her daily—this really drained my body and soul. One of my hobbies is handicrafts, I guess. This new year, instead of visiting family as is custom, I visited Cello's grave and made a lovely shelved arrangement of photos, a miniature Zen garden and so on. I'm proud enough of it that I always want to show it off. [Laughs]

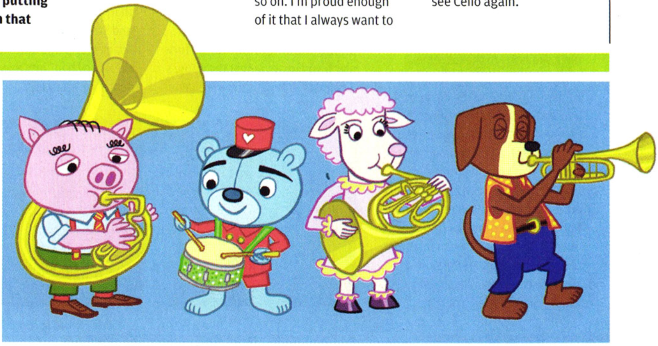
What kinds of music do you especially enjoy?
Lately I've been drawn to '70s black music (and music influenced by it). Outside of that, I am heavily influenced by Joe Zawinul. Whether it's games or music, when you are creating something, striking a balance between intuition and control is very important, and I think that Zawinul combined these two with great aplomb.

Whose works in other forms of media, film, or literature, do you admire or enjoy?
Towards the end of last year I watched the new Tamagotchi anime, but this was work-related, so I guess it's been awhile really. Around the same time some of my friends watched *I am Legend*, but they got angry because the content seemed different than the trailer. [Laughs] I haven't had much time to read lately, but I'm a fan of Roger Penrose, George Lakoff, Steven Pinker, and so on.

If you could have a superpower, what would it be and why?
The ability to visit heaven would be nice, as I'd like to see Cello again.

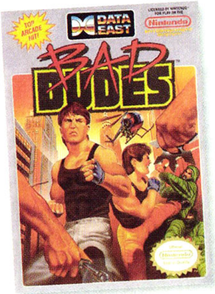


MUSIKA
2007, iPOD
PRODUCER



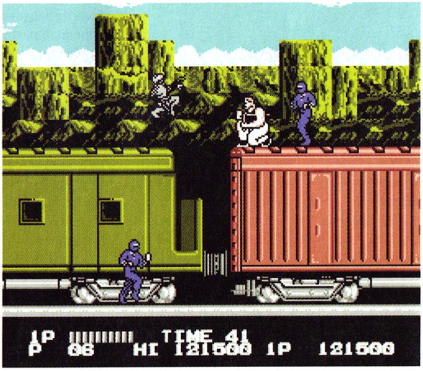
MAJOR MINOR'S MAJESTIC MARCH
2008, Wii
PRODUCER

BAD DUDES



PLATFORM: NES
DEVELOPER: DATA EAST
PUBLISHER: DATA EAST
RELEASE DATE: 1989
COVERED IN ISSUES: 5, 7, 10, 11, 12

Ninjas, hamburgers, and the president star in this unintentionally camp classic.



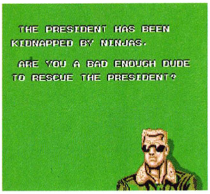
Had the ninjas known that the bad dudes could take and use their nunchucks, we doubt they would've kidnapped the President.

Nothing represents the '80s era of cheesy video game street toughs better than Data East's cult classic Bad Dudes. To be honest, it wasn't a great game back in the day, and it's only gotten worse with age. But Bad Dudes earned a special place in players' hearts with its ridiculous over-the-top setup: the president of the United States has been kidnapped by ninjas. When you press Start and the Secret Service agent challenges you with, "Are you a bad enough dude to rescue the President?" all any red-blooded American can do is salute, rock out to a little air guitar, and bash some ninja skulls in—to the extreme.

The bare-bones action in Bad Dudes adds little to the dusty beat-'em-up formula of forerunners on the NES, such as Kung Fu—you simply punch and kick ninjas that run at you. The stages are split horizontally into high and low areas, and choosing when to switch between them provides the game's only bit of strategy. The main draw of the original arcade version—simultaneous two-player action—was, sadly, stripped from the underpowered NES port, meaning that the game really should have been called Bad Dude.

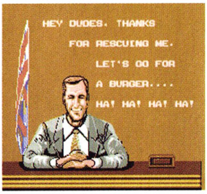
Before the punch-and-kick tedium of the game can completely wear thin, you beat a boss, and your character—either Blade or Striker—throws his fists in the air and gargles, "I'm bad!" with all the voice-sampling power an NES Game Pak could muster. It's silly moments like this that keep you playing—moments made even funnier if you imagine that the game's designers thought they were genuinely cool when they put them in. As if kids in the '80s would pump their fists in the air along with their chosen bad dude and shout back, "Yeah! Rad! You tell 'em, Striker!"

I'd love to see a sequel made by a team like WayForward (the folks who recently developed Contra 4), who could build a fun game around the series' cheesy charm. I imagine that, all these years later, Blade and Striker would still be wearing *Miami Vice* pants and slipping the word "bad" into every other sentence. —CHRIS SL.



THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED BY NINJAS.

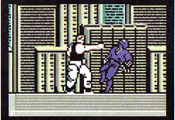
ARE YOU A BAD ENOUGH DUDE TO RESCUE THE PRESIDENT?



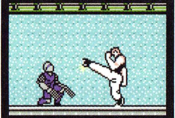
HEY DUDES. THANKS FOR RESCUING ME. LET'S GO FOR A BURGER.... HA! HA! HA! HA!

MAD SKILLZ

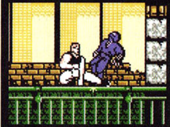
The dope set of attacks in Bad Dudes is off the chain, bro! Check it: Punches *and* kicks, in the *same game*! And that ain't all, home slice—there's a whole *two other* moves! Who's bad?



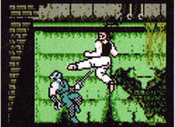
PUNCH!
A lifetime of ninjutsu training is no match for a fat five-knuckle sandwich.



KICK!
The dudes' funky fresh parachute pants give them room to stretch those legs out.



LOW KICK!
Ninjas can't deal with breakdancing moves like this 'cause they ain't got no soul.

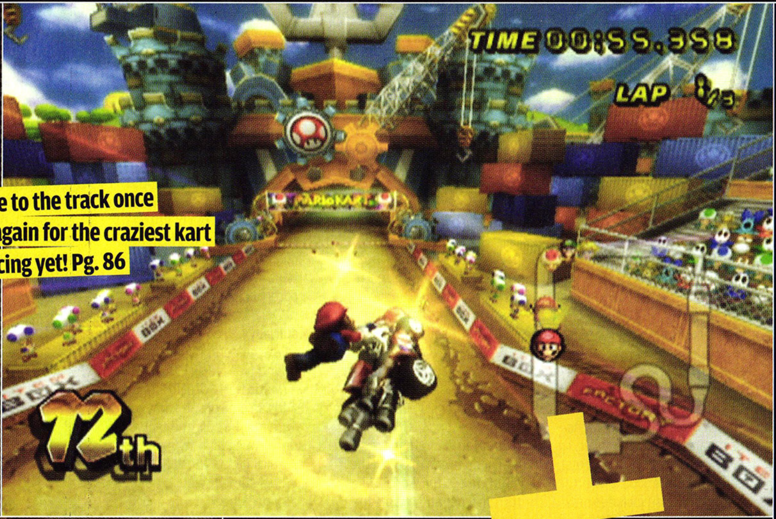


SPIN KICK!
Press A and B together to take flight like a majestic ninja-hating eagle.

HAVE A FAVORITE CLASSIC GAME YOU'D LIKE TO SEE REVISITED?
Send us your requests—we'll consider them for a future installment of Playback. **nintendopower@futureus.com**

REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

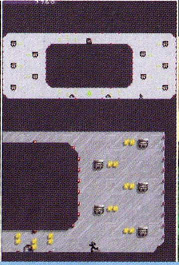

TIME 00:55.358
LAP 1/3
12th

Take to the track once again for the craziest kart racing yet! Pg. 86

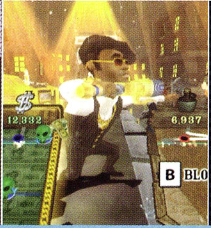
88
Is Okami's Wii revamp as majestic as the critically acclaimed original?

What the...
I can hear voices in my head!

87
The World Ends with You is one of the strangest—and best—games for DS.



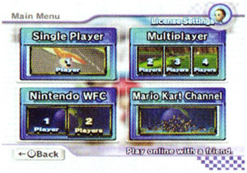
89
Cool physics + ninjas + a level editor combine to pack N+ with fun platforming action.

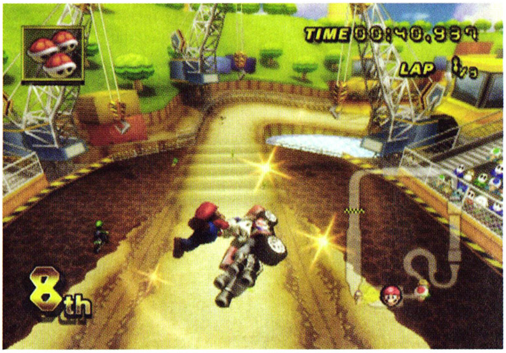

12,332
6,937
B BLO

87
Wii rocks out with the quirky rhythm game Battle of the Bands.

+ Rondo of Swords, MiniCopter: Adventure Flight, Puchi Puchi Virus, Summer Sports: Paradise Island, and more.

Luigi
Wario
3rd





Toad's Factory
Worldwide Ranking
Back

Victory Lap

MARIO KART Wii

RATING: 9.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

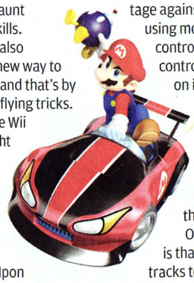
Hot on the heels of Super Smash Bros. Brawl comes the next must-have multiplayer title, Mario Kart Wii. This latest edition of Nintendo's storied racing franchise includes new twists and turns like bikes, aerial tricks, motion control, robust Wi-Fi Connection features, and a Wii Wheel right in the box. All of these additions make a great series even better, and we can't imagine going without any of them ever again.

At first it's tough to tell much of a difference between driving a kart and riding a bike, but when you get serious about shaving seconds off your lap times, you'll find that a few little distinctions can make all the difference in the world. Bikes turn sharper and enable the player to boost at any time by popping a wheelie (although this move is only practical on straightaways). While drifting, however, a bike can only charge up to a one-stage miniturbo; a kart can power up to stage two. By the way, miniturbos are charged up differently than before—now you only have to hold your drift for a certain length of time instead of having to steer in and out of it. The tighter the turn, the faster the charge. This change has the benefit of making the series' core mechanic easier for new players to get the hang of, while still leaving room for Mario Kart experts to flaunt their advanced skills.

TIME 00:49.245
LAP 2/3
9th

Mario Kart Wii also adds an entirely new way to earn miniturbos, and that's by performing high-flying tricks. A quick flick of the Wii Wheel—timed right as you launch off a ramp, hill, or bump—will send your racer spinning, flipping, and kicking through the air. Upon landing, you are rewarded with an instant boost. It quickly becomes second nature to perform tricks at every opportunity, and soon you'll start to look for every little hop hidden on each track. With more opportunities to boost than in any previous game in the series, pro players will find ways to string together miniturbos all the way around the tracks. Not only is this a fun way to play, but it adds another strategic wrinkle to the classic Kart formula.

While you can choose to play with the Wii remote, remote and nunchuk, Classic controller, or GameCube controller, the included Wii Wheel is a fantastic new option that, frankly, works much better than I'd have guessed. While other racing games have dabbled in motion control, none of them have nailed it like this. It only takes a few races to get the feel for your turning radius, and then a wheel user won't be at any disadvantage against a competitor using more-traditional controls. No matter which control option you settle on in the long run, I highly suggest that you at least give the Wii Wheel a decent chance when you first play the game.



One small complaint is that the new racetracks tend to outshine the returning retro courses with more detailed visuals, fresher ideas, and more stuff going on. Still, with a grand total of 32 tracks, you definitely get your money's worth. Mario Kart Wii falls short of our top score only in comparison to Nintendo's other recent big-name games: it isn't as revolutionary as Super Mario Galaxy and doesn't pack in as much sheer content as Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Still, it delivers the action that Mario Kart fans crave and then some. With more features, modes, and multiplayer options than ever before, fans should be revved up to get behind the wheel.
—CHRIS SL.

WRITERS' BLOCK

IT'S VACATION TIME! WHICH VIDEO GAME WORLD WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT?

Justin Cheng

I'd like to vacation in the Rock Band world so that I could become a rock star, even though I can't play an instrument in real life.

Chris Hoffman

I'd visit Santa Destroy from No More Heroes. Sun, sand, surf, plus you can eat at the Burger Suplex! Count me out of the assassin's tournament though. Too messy.

Tom Holoien

I really hate all of the strange looks that I get when I yell "Objection!", so I would probably go to the world of the Ace Attorney games. Plus, I could buy my Snackoos direct and avoid those crazy import prices.

Scott Pelland

I'd book a trip to any planet from the Metroid series. It might not be a very restful vacation, but how can you beat visiting alien worlds and cultures?

Chris Shepperd

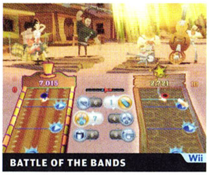
My village in Animal Crossing, because I know my neighbors won't stay mad at me for long.

Chris Slate

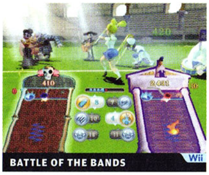
I'd visit Super Mario Sunshine's Delfino Island and kick back at Gelato Beach. Diving for red coins by day... enjoying the watermelon festival by night...and stomping on Cataquacks every chance I get. Ah, that's the life.

Steve Thomason

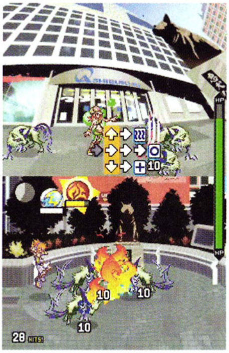
Believe it or not, I wanna go to Raccoon City. I've spent a lot of time thinking about how I'd survive the zombie apocalypse and I'd like to put those plans to the test. Plus, Jill's a hottie.

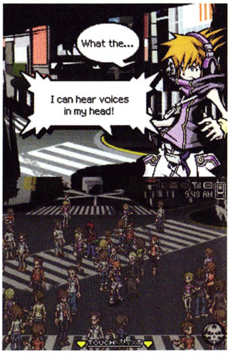


BATTLE OF THE BANDS



BATTLE OF THE BANDS





BATTLE OF THE BANDS

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **PLANET MOON STUDIOS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Offering a clever new take on the rhythm genre, Battle of the Bands is probably best described as a musical tug-of-war. Players flick and shake the Wii remote in time to onscreen prompts, and launch attacks at the opposing group by hitting a certain number of consecutive notes. Whichever band performs better and lays the aural smack down on their opponent gets to play their version of the song until the other group retaliates. You can choose from five types of bands—rock, funk/hip-hop, country, Latin, and marching—and each of the game's 30+ tracks has been recorded in all five styles. As one might imagine, some of the interpretations are pretty amusing. You've got Cypress Hill's "Insane in the Brain" performed with a southern twang, a Spanish-language version of Kool & the Gang's "Jungle Boogie," and some wicked tuba on Tenacious D's "Master Exploder." Unfortunately, some of the cover work is genuinely bad (the hip-hop vocals in Def Leopard's "Photograph" may cause neighborhood dogs to start howling), which can put a damper on your enthusiasm for dominating a song. The game's a bit one-note in nature, as well, but at least it's a catchy little ditty. —STEVE T.

Wonderful World

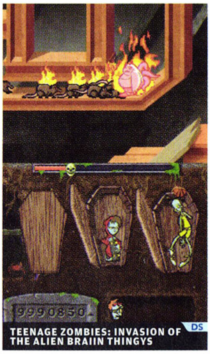
THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

RATING: 9.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX/JUPITER**
ESRB: **TEEN**

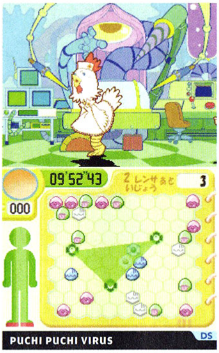
I'm as big a Final Fantasy nut as you're likely to find, but it's nice to see Square Enix stray off the beaten path once in a while. And you can't stray much farther than The World Ends with You. This delightfully weird action-RPG, set in modern-day Tokyo's bustling Shibuya district, is unlike anything else out there. That sounds clichéd, but in this case it's absolutely true. How many games feature a real-time battle system in which you control a different character on each screen simultaneously? Or regional fashion trends that grant stat bonuses to your hero based on which brand of clothing he wears? Or a food system that restricts how much a character can eat in an actual 24-hour period, then requires him to digest a meal (by fighting battles, of course) before gaining its benefits? And while the game is bursting at the seams with new ideas, the developers were careful not to just throw 'em at the wall and hope they stick. The dual-screened battle system, for example, seems completely unmanageable at first, but it does a great job of bringing you along slowly and gradually peeling back additional layers of depth.

Pulling the entire experience together is a wonderfully compelling, and at times touching, narrative. It's not your typical save-the-world story, but rather a more intimate quest that focuses on the personal struggles of its protagonists. Though less-patient gamers may find the copious amounts of dialogue annoying, the writing is excellent and you'd need a cold heart to not grow attached to these characters. Special mention is also required of the fittingly eclectic soundtrack, which boldly mixes disparate music styles to fantastic effect.

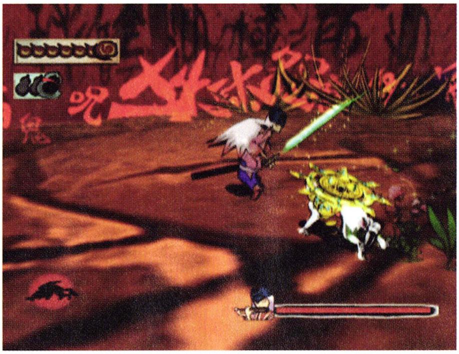
The World Ends with You may not have a big name like Final Fantasy or Kingdom Hearts attached to it, but it certainly deserves the same kind of success. Kudos to Square Enix for taking a chance on something so original (and for bringing the game to these shores). Please encourage them—buy this game. —STEVE T.



TEENAGE ZOMBIES: INVASION OF THE ALIEN BRAIIN THINGYS



PUCHI PUCHI VIRUS



TEENAGE ZOMBIES: INVASION OF THE ALIEN BRAIN THINGYS

RATING: **7.0**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **INLIGHT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

As a fan of zombie movies and puzzle games, I thought Teenage Zombies would be the game for me. And it is, though not as much as I had hoped. The concept is sound: three zombies are all that stand between evil alien brains and global domination. Each of the three has a specific skill: Lefty can reach high ledges with her extending arm; Fins has tentacles on his back that he uses to climb walls and wires; and Half-Pipe uses his skateboard to jump across gaps, and his short stature to traverse narrow passages. And each zombie has specific tools that only they can use (Half-Pipe can get larger tires for his skateboard so he can cross electrified floors, for example). You'll use all three zombies' skills—swapping between them on the fly—to get through the game's seven environments. If you've ever played The Lost Vikings on SNES, you get the gist.

As good as this all sounds, Teenage Zombies is not without its issues. The story is appropriately B-movie-esque, with a comic-book presentation. It's too bad, though, that the game often tries too hard to be funny. (The Big Brain collects snow globes! Hilarious!) In terms of gameplay, the collision detection could use some work: you have to be on the very edge of a ledge for Lefty to grab it, and Half-Pipe will sometimes miss jumps that he should make. But thanks to clever puzzle-solving and some touch screen-centric minigames for variety, Teenage Zombies is good fun. —JUSTIN C.

PUCHI PUCHI VIRUS

RATING: **7.0**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **NIS AMERICA**
DEVELOPER: **JALECO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

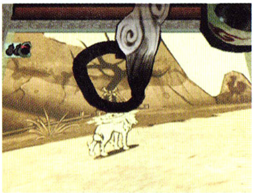
Your goal in puzzle game Puchi Puchi Virus is to cure people of the nasty Puchirus by tapping three viruses of the same color to create a triangle of destruction. Wait too long, and the viruses will congeal, making them indestructible until you trap them in another triangle of viruses. If you run out of destructible viruses, it's game over. What makes the game frustrating is that the viruses appear onscreen randomly and start congealing quickly, so you don't have a lot of time to plan ahead for chaining opportunities—which can be a problem when you're tasked with performing three chains of seven in three minutes. I did want to keep playing even when I was stuck, though, if only to read the patients' often-humorous names and case files. —JUSTIN C.

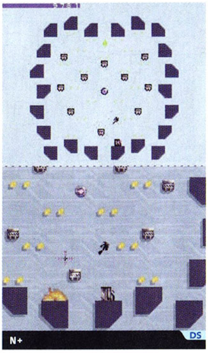
When Nature Calls

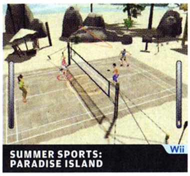
OKAMI

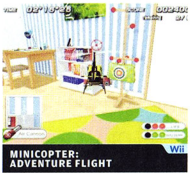
RATING: **7.5**
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CLOVER STUDIO/ READY AT DAWN**
ESRB: **TEEN**

I really, really want to love Okami. And in many ways I do. From a conceptual and structural standpoint, this adventure is absolutely brilliant. True, the creators have admitted taking a lot of the ideas from The Legend of Zelda, but if you're going to borrow, you might as well borrow from the best. Regardless of the game's origins, there's a ton of quality gaming here. The world is vast and beautiful—the Japanese-watercolor aesthetic looks as impressive now as it did when the game hit PS2 in 2006. There's also a ton to do in this world; as in Zelda, there are diversions all over the place, collectibles to obtain, and secrets that open up once you've learned a new skill, in addition to the requisite dungeons and clever boss fights. So why am I having such a hard time recommending this game? Quite simply, the controls just didn't make the jump to Wii as well as they should have. One of Okami's main hooks is the ability to learn Celestial Brush techniques, which are activated by drawing symbols; it's a natural fit for the Wii remote, and while pointing and drawing is faster and allows for more freedom than using an analog stick, it's harder to be precise, resulting in the game having a tougher time recognizing your brush strokes. More significantly, the combat feels awkward. Slow, timed swipes of the remote are required to score consecutive hits with many weapons; if you swing too fast you won't be able to attack at all. And where's the motion-based fishing? For shame! Though you can overcome the drawing and attacking issues with practice (and by sticking to whip-style weapons), it's a hurdle you shouldn't have to leap. Okami is a work of genius, but you should play the original game instead of the Wii version if you can. —CHRIS H.









N+

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **SILVERBIRCH STUDIOS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Puzzle-platformer N+ is a case study in elegant simplicity. The core mechanics couldn't be less sophisticated—use the Control Pad to run and press the A Button to jump—yet the game hooks you with wonderfully devious level design and the pure delight of watching your diminutive ninja bound across the screen like Neo from *The Matrix*. More than 100 single-player levels and an equally beefy selection of two-player co-op boards will put even the most seasoned gamer's platforming skills to the test, and a robust (though unintuitive) level editor lets you build your own creations and share them with friends. The easily frustrated should probably stay away, and for what it is, the game's MSRP of $29.99 seems a bit steep. Otherwise, this is a fun little gem. —STEVE T.

SUMMER SPORTS: PARADISE ISLAND

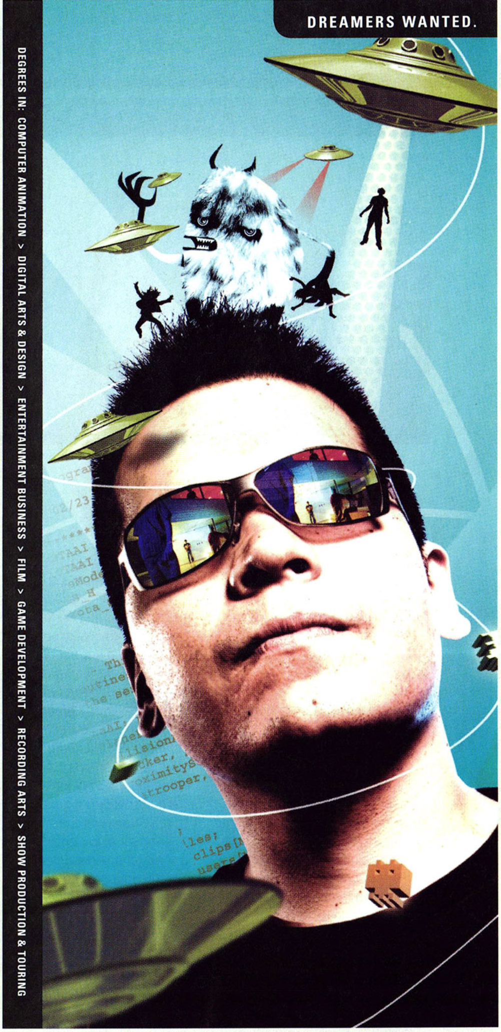
RATING: 3.5
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **DESTINEER**
DEVELOPER: **DIGITAL EMBRYO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

For a new Wii sports game to impress us it has to be something special. Summer Sports: Paradise Island is certainly special, but for all the wrong reasons. The most frustrating thing about the game is that you must play with four people (human or computer) at all times, and the computer's turns can't be skipped or fast-forwarded. As a result, you'll often spend more time waiting than actually playing. On top of that, none of the games control particularly well. Summer Sports is boring at best and aggravating at worst. —TOM H.

MINICOPTER: ADVENTURE FLIGHT

RATING: 6.5
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **SONIC POWERED**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

In the vein of games like Endless Ocean, MiniCopter: Adventure Flight is a title that won't appeal to everyone, but will prove entertaining for players looking to do something different on Wii. The fun in MiniCopter is derived from flying a small, maneuverable vehicle through a human-sized world, and despite the game's title, you'll be primarily performing an assortment of simple (but varied and enjoyable) tasks rather than going on an adventure. Both the remote-based and Classic-style control configurations are up to the task, but more-realistic visuals would have enhanced the experience. —CHRIS H.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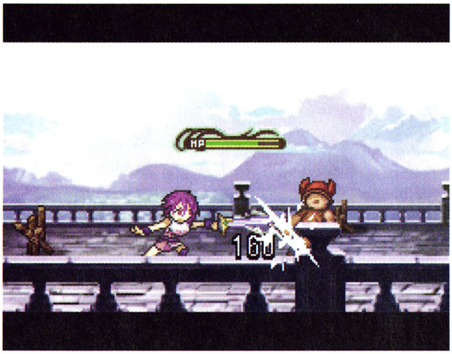
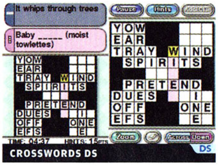


CASTLE OF SHIKIGAMI III


CROSSWORDS DS

MLB 2K8 FANTASY ALL STARS

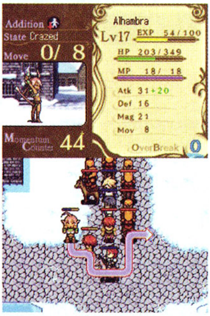
WILD EARTH: AFRICAN SAFARI

Sordid Sorcery

RONDO OF SWORDS

RATING: 6.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **SUCCESS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Rondo of Swords may look like every other turn-based strategy-RPG, but it doesn't play like any of them. Instead of selecting commands, you draw movement paths for your characters through allies and enemies, and your guys gain stat boosts from their friends and take swings at their foes as they run along the path. Other innovations include a momentum system in which enemies target the heroes who are doing the most damage, and a side-quest system that puts idle characters to good use.



These are all fine ideas, but the game has just as many bad ones. A mix of grueling difficulty and unclear objectives makes it virtually impossible to complete most maps without restarting several times—I've all but bored a hole in my DS screen at the place you tap to select Quit and Retry. And with no ability to engage in optional battles, there is no good way to raise low-level characters or to grind for experience when a series of narrow victories has left your party behind the curve. Even shopping can be infuriating—to buy items you have to send a character on a shopping side quest, which could end with him spending all of your money randomly and getting absolutely nothing in return. That's just cruel.

The payoff for Rondo's many frustrations is the deep satisfaction you'll feel upon completing its brutally tough maps. Since you can never overpower your foes, you'll have to outsmart them, and Rondo's emphasis on careful positioning works neural pathways that more conventional strategy games neglect. The triumphs may be sweet, but the aggravations have them outnumbered. —CASEY L.

CASTLE OF SHIKIGAMI III

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **AKSYS**
DEVELOPER: **ALFA SYSTEM**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Like many gamers, I have a love-hate relationship with shooters. The games are often fun, but also frustrating because they push your skills to the limit. Castle of Shikigami III is no different in this regard, but it does stand out because it gives you an attack bonus for flying near enemy projectiles, and it has memorable characters that spew truly funny dialogue. (Those who have played Castle Shikigami 2 on PS2 might be slightly disappointed that the localization in Castle of Shikigami III isn't as unintentionally awesomely bad, however.) Ultimately, Castle of Shikigami III is fun and has good replay value since each character feels different and has a unique storyline—the storylines even take a second player into account when you're playing cooperatively, which is a nice touch. —JUSTIN C.

MLB 2K8 FANTASY ALL-STARS

RATING: 6.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **2K SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **DEEP FRIED ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Baseball games are notoriously difficult to pull off on handheld systems; there are just so many aspects to the sport that need to be accounted for. Fantasy All-Stars handles the tasks, including batting, pitching, fielding, and base-running, remarkably well by using the touch screen extensively and by keeping the gestures extremely simple. It's a lesson more-hardcore sports sims could learn from. The various power-ups are fun, if a little unfair—special pitches are virtually impossible to hit, allowing for a lot of free strikes. While there's a lot of good stuff going on inside a game, the modes are skimpy, even for a title aimed at the younger set. Wi-Fi multiplayer is nice, but we'd trade it in an heartbeat for single-card action. —CHRIS SH.

ALSO THIS MONTH

We got Codemasters's **Emergency Mayhem** for Wii too late to give it a full review, but our early impressions indicated that riding in a real ambulance might be more fun.... Think of Majesco's **Wild Earth: African Safari** as Pokémon Snap, but with more elephants and fewer electric rodents.... Though the themes are kind of bland, the tables play well in Southpeak's **Dream Pinball 3D**, available for both Wii and DS.... The variety of cerebral challenges in Eidos's **Brain Voyage** for DS keeps things interesting.... With hundreds of puzzles, Nintendo's **Crosswords DS** will keep wordsmiths occupied for eons.

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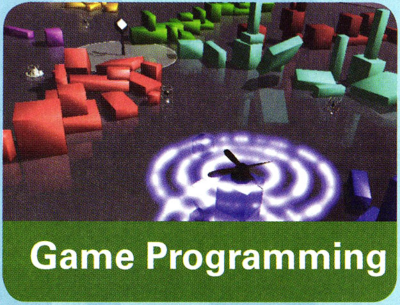

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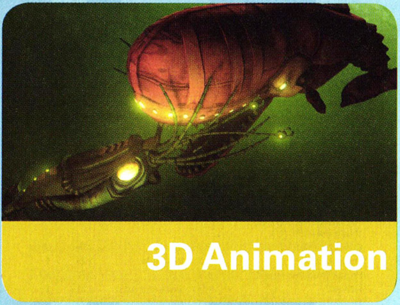

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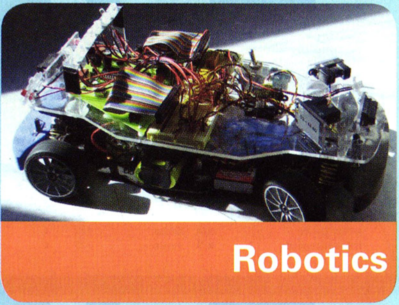


Robotics

[ARCHIVE]

BACK TO SCHOOL

It's definitely hard to follow up on the awesomeness that is Super Smash Bros. Brawl, but we reviewed some great games last issue. If you missed Rockstar's Bully when it was released two years ago, you've got a second chance with Bully: Scholarship Edition (8.5). Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword (8.5) proved to be the master of handheld action games, and Sega Superstars Tennis (8.0) was a smash hit on both Wii and DS. Will this trend of greatness continue into the rest of the year? With games like Mario Kart Wii hitting the scene, we think so.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

Wii				
TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Alien Syndrome	6.0	Sega	220	T
Alvin and the Chipmunks	N/A	Brash	224	E
Baroque	3.0	Atlus	227	T
• Battalion Wars 2	7.5	Nintendo	222	T
Ben 10: Protector of Earth	N/A	D3PA	223	E10+
The Bigs	6.0	2K Sports	218	E
Bionicle Heroes	5.0	Eidos	216	E10+
Bleach: Shattered Blade	N/A	Sega	222	T
Bomberman Land	5.0	Hudson	226	E
Boogie	5.5	Electronic Arts	220	E10+
Brunswick Pro Bowling	6.0	Crave	219	E
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Rockstar	227	T
Bust-a-Move Bash!	6.5	Majesco	217	E
Carnival Games	7.0	Global Star	220	E
Code Lyoko: Quest for Infinity	N/A	The Game Factory	223	E10+
Cooking Mama: Cook Off	7.5	Majesco	216	E
Cranium Kabookii	N/A	Ubisoft	224	E
Crash of the Titans	6.5	Sierra	221	E10+
Cruis'n	N/A	Midway	224	E
CSI: Hard Evidence	N/A	Ubisoft	225	M
Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party	8.0	Konami	221	E10+
Dave Mirra BMX Challenge	4.0	Crave	220	E
Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed	7.0	THQ	227	T
• Dewy's Adventure	7.0	Konami	221	E
Donkey Kong: Barrel Blast	6.5	Nintendo	221	E
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 3	N/A	Atari	223	T
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.0	Square Enix	226	T
Driver: Parallel Lines	5.0	Ubisoft	219	M
• Endless Ocean	7.5	Nintendo	225	E
Escape from Bug Island!	3.5	Eidos	217	M
• FIFA 08	N/A	Electronic Arts	222	E
Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn	9.5	Nintendo	222	E10+
Furu Furu Park	N/A	Majesco	225	T
Game Party	N/A	Midway	224	E
• Geometry Wars: Galaxies	8.0	Sierra	222	E
• Ghost Squad	7.0	Sega	223	T
The Godfather: Blackhand Edition	8.0	Electronic Arts	216	M
Godzilla Unleashed	5.5	Atari	223	E10+
The Golden Compass	4.0	Sega	224	E10+
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core	8.0	Aksys Games	222	T
• Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	9.0	Activision	222	T
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	7.0	Electronic Arts	218	E10+
Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law	6.5	Capcom	224	T
High School Musical: Sing It!	N/A	Disney Interactive	223	E
The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.0	Sega	227	M
Indoor Sports	N/A	Konami	223	E
Indy 500 Legends	N/A	Destineer	223	E
Jenga	N/A	Atari	223	E
Jumper	N/A	Brash	226	T
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	N/A	Konami	226	E
Kawasaki Quad Bikes	N/A	Destineer	223	E
Kidz Sports: Basketball	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Kidz Sports: Ice Hockey	N/A	Destineer	225	E
Legend of the Dragon	5.5	The Game Factory	218	T
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	N/A	LucasArts	222	E
Link's Crossbow Training	6.5	Nintendo	223	T
Looney Tunes: Acme Arsenal	3.5	WB Games	221	E10+
• Madden NFL 08	8.0	Electronic Arts	220	E
Manhunt 2	7.5	Rockstar Games	223	M
• Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	7.5	Sega	223	E
Mario Party 8	7.5	Nintendo	217	E
• Mario Strikers Charged	8.5	Nintendo	219	E10+
• Medal of Honor Heroes 2	8.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	6.0	Electronic Arts	217	T
Mercury Meltdown Revolution	6.0	Ignition	221	E
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	10	Nintendo	220	T
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	N/A	Aksys	227	E
MLB 2K8	6.5	2K Sports	227	E
MLB Power Pros	6.5	2K Sports	222	E
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.0	Midway	217	M
• MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
My Word Coach	N/A	Ubisoft	223	E
MySims	7.0	Electronic Arts	221	E
Namco Museum Remix	N/A	Namco Bandai	222	E
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	222	T
Need For Speed ProStreet	8.0	Electronic Arts	223	E10+
Nicktoons: Attack of the Toybots	N/A	THQ	223	E
• NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams	9.0	Sega	224	E
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
• Nitro Bike	3.5	Ubisoft	225	E10+
No More Heroes	8.0	Ubisoft	226	M
Obscure: The Aftermath	7.0	Ignition	227	M
Octomania	N/A	Conspiracy	227	E
One Piece: Unlimited Adventure	6.5	Namco Bandai	225	T
Opoona	7.0	Koei	227	E10+
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	7.5	Crave	227	E10+
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	4.5	Disney Interactive	217	T
• Pokémon Battle Revolution	6.5	Nintendo	218	E
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	N/A	D3PA	224	E10+
Ratatouille	7.5	THQ	218	E
• Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	6.5	Ubisoft	223	E10+
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.0	Capcom	223	M
Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	9.0	Capcom	218	M
Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis	N/A	Rockstar	222	E
Samurai Warriors: Katana	7.5	Koei	224	T
Scarface: The World Is Yours	7.5	Sierra	218	M
Sega Bass Fishing	5.0	Sega	227	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E10+
Showtime Championship Boxing	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E10+
The Simpsons Game	4.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
Smarty Pants	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	E
• Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	7.0	Sega	225	E
Soulcalibur Legends	6.5	Namco Bandai	223	T
Spider-Man 3	6.0	Activision	217	T
Summer Sports: Paradise Island	N/A	Destineer	227	E
Super Mario Galaxy	9.5	Nintendo	223	E
Super Paper Mario	9.5	Nintendo	216	E
• Super Smash Bros. Brawl	10	Nintendo	226	T
Super Swing Golf Season 2	6.5	Tecmo	224	E10+
Surf's Up	6.0	Ubisoft	217	E10+
Tamagotchi: Party On!	2.5	Namco Bandai	217	E
Target: Terror	N/A	Konami	227	M
Thrillville: Off the Rails	N/A	LucasArts	222	E
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	8.0	Electronic Arts	221	E
Tomb Raider Anniversary	6.5	Eidos	223	T
Transformers: The Game	5.5	Activision	219	T
Trauma Center: New Blood	8.0	Atlus	223	T
Victorious Boxers: Revolution	N/A	XSEED	222	T

REVIEWER NOTES

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

The Smash-crazy NP team almost came to blows over who would write the game's blurb here in Reviews Archive this month. The compromise? Everyone gets to chime in! Hey, it's Brawl—normal rules don't apply. I was able to state most of my opinions in the review, so I'll just add that the game's many modes have kept me totally hooked. Will Brawl *ever* wear out?
—CHRIS SL.

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

Packed with plenty of Nintendo goodness, Super Smash Bros. Brawl is a fan's dream come true. To be honest, though, a major reason I like it more than the previous games is because it has Solid Snake.
—JUSTIN C.

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

And a major reason I like it more than the previous games is because it has Sonic. As an old-school Sega fan, it was like a dream come true showing Mario and company who's boss with the blue blur. Unfortunately, the rest of the staff has surpassed my skills recently, so the hedgehog's wins have become increasingly rare. I'd better go practice. —STEVE T.

Worms: A Space Oddity	6.0	THQ	227	E10+
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008	6.5	THQ	222	T
WWII Aces	3.0	Destineer	226	T
Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure	9.0	Capcom	222	E
NINTENDO DS				
• Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	8.5	Nintendo	225	E10+
Alvin and the Chipmunks	N/A	Brash	223	E
American Girl: Julie Finds a Way	N/A	THQ	224	E
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8.0	Capcom	226	T
Are you Smarter Than a 5th Grader?	N/A	THQ	223	E
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	7.5	Ubisoft	226	T
Balls of Fury	N/A	Destination Software	222	E10+
• Bleach: The Blade of Fate	8.5	Sega	222	T
• Bomberman Land Touch! 2	6.0	Hudson	225	E
Boogie	7.0	Electronic Arts	224	E10+
Brain Challenge	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
Bratz: Super Babyz	N/A	THQ	226	E
Brothers In Arms DS	9.0	Ubisoft	218	T
Build-A-Bear Workshop	N/A	The Game Factory	223	E
Cake Mania	5.5	Majesco	216	E
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	Activision	223	T
Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol	8.5	Nintendo	221	E
Code Lyoko	7.0	The Game Factory	218	E10+
Contra 4	8.5	Konami	222	T
Cookie & Cream	6.5	Agetec	217	E
Corvette Evolution GT	N/A	Jack of All Games	223	E
Cooking Mama 2: Dinner with Friends	7.0	Majesco	223	E
Death Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom	5.0	Konami	217	E10+
Dementium: The Ward	8.5	Gamecock	223	M
Diner Dash: Sizzle & Serve	6.5	Eidos	217	E
DK Jungle Climber	8.0	Nintendo	221	E
Draglade	7.5	Atlus	224	E10+
Dragon Ball Z: Harukanaru Densetsu	4.0	Atari	217	E
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker	8.0	Square Enix	222	E10+
Drawn to Life	7.5	THQ	221	E
Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of Ancient Arts	6.5	Hudson	226	T
Dynasty Warriors DS: Fighter's Battle	7.5	Koei	219	E10+
Etrian Odyssey	7.0	Atlus	217	T
Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2.0	2K Games	218	E10+
FIFA 08	8.0	Electronic Arts	221	E
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	7.0	Square Enix	226	E10+
• Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales	7.0	Square Enix	216	E
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	7.5	Square Enix	223	E10+
Flipper Critters	4.5	Ignition Entertainment	218	E
Freedom Wings	6.0	Natsume	207	E10+
Front Mission	6.5	Square Enix	222	E10+
Fullmetal Alchemist Trading Card Game	7.0	Destineer	219	T
Garfield Gets Real	N/A	Destination	223	E
Garfield's Nightmare	7.0	The Game Factory	220	E
• Geometry Wars: Galaxies	N/A	Sierra	222	E
Glory Days 2: Brotherhood of Men	6.0	Eidos	218	E10+
Godzilla Unleashed: Double Smash	3.0	Atari	224	E
The Golden Compass	N/A	Sega	223	E10+
Hannah Montana: Music Jam	N/A	Disney Interactive	223	E
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	7.0	Electronic Arts	218	E10+
Harvest Moon DS Cute	7.5	Natsume	226	E
• Heroes of Mana	6.5	Square Enix	219	E10+
Homie Rollerz	N/A	Destineer	226	E
Hoshigami Remix	6.0	Aksys Games	218	E
Impossible Mission	N/A	Codemasters	223	E
Indy 500 Legends	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Insecticide	6.5	Gamecock	226	E10+
Jackass: The Game	N/A	Red Mile Entertainment	225	T
Left Brain, Right Brain	N/A	Majesco	224	E
• The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	9.5	Nintendo	221	E
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	N/A	LucasArts	222	E
LifeSigns: Surgical Unit	N/A	Dreamcatcher	223	T
Looney Tunes: Duck Amuck	3.5	WB Games	221	E
Lost in Blue 3	5.5	Konami	227	E10+
• Luminous Arc	8.0	Atlus	219	T
Madden NFL 08	7.5	Electronic Arts	220	E
• Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	7.5	Sega	225	E
Mario Party DS	8.0	Nintendo	223	E
Master of Illusion	N/A	Nintendo	223	E
• Mega Man Star Force	7.5	Capcom	220	E
Mega Man ZX Advent	8.5	Capcom	222	E10+
Miami Nights: Singles in the City	N/A	Ubisoft	225	T
Monster Jam	N/A	Activision	223	E
MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
MySims	N/A	Electronic Arts	222	E
Myst	5.0	Empire Interactive	227	E
Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer	6.5	Sega	226	E
Namco Museum DS	8.0	Namco Bandai	221	E
• Nanostray 2	6.0	Majesco	225	E
Naruto: Ninja Council 3	6.0	Tomy/D3PA	217	E10+
Naruto: Ninja Destiny	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	226	T
Naruto: Path of the Ninja	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	222	E10+
• Need For Speed ProStreet	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	E
Nervous Brickdown	7.0	Eidos	219	E
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	8.5	Tecmo	227	T
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
Ontamarama	7.0	Atlus	223	E
Operation: Vietnam	8.0	Majesco	220	T
Orcs & Elves	5.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
Panzer Tactics DS	N/A	Conspiracy	223	E10+
Pet Alien	8.0	The Game Factory	219	E
Petz: Bunnyz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
Petz Wild Animals: Tigerz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations	8.5	Capcom	222	T
• Picross DS	8.0	Nintendo	219	E
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	7.0	Disney Interactive	217	E10+
• Planet Puzzle League	8.5	Nintendo	217	E
• Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	9.0	Nintendo	216	E
Prism: Light the Way	8.5	Eidos	219	E
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Professional Fisherman's Tour: Northern Hemisphere	5.0	UFO Interactive	219	E
• Professor Layton and the Curious Village	8.5	Nintendo	225	E
Puppy Palace	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
Puzzle de Harvest Moon	N/A	Natsume	223	E
• Race Driver: Create & Race	7.5	Codemasters	219	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	N/A	Ubisoft	223	E10+
• River King: Mystic Valley	7.0	Natsume	225	E
• Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	7.0	Natsume	219	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E
The Settlers	5.0	Ubisoft	217	E
Shrek The Third	7.0	Activision	217	E
SimCity DS	8.0	Electronic Arts	218	E
The Simpsons Game	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	T
Sonic Rush Adventure	9.0	Sega	221	E
Spider-Man 3	7.0	Activision	217	E10+
Strawberry Shortcake: 4 Seasons Cake	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E
Thrillville: Off the Rails	N/A	LucasArts	222	E
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	8.5	Electronic Arts	221	E
Time Ace	6.5	Konami	216	E10+
Touch Detective 2 ½	6.5	Atlus	221	E
Touch The Dead	5.5	Eidos	217	M
• TouchMaster	8.0	Midway	219	E
• Transformers: Autobots	6.0	Activision	219	E10+
• Transformers: Decepticons	6.0	Activision	219	E10+
Ultimate Mortal Kombat	N/A	Midway	223	M
• Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8.0	THQ	224	T
The Wild West	3.5	Majesco	220	E10+
Wordjong	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Worms: Open Warfare 2	7.5	THQ	221	E10+
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008	N/A	THQ	222	T
• Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2008	N/A	Konami	224	E
Zoo Tycoon 2 DS	7.0	THQ	226	E

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

I'm not the biggest Smash fanatic in the world—the control has always been looser than I like for a fighting game, and this edition doesn't change that—but there's no denying that Brawl is awesome. There's just so much crammed into this game (including totally unnecessary but fantastic content like the Chronicle and classic game demos) that I can't see anybody not loving it. —CHRIS H.

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

This being the first Super Smash Bros. that I've ever played, it was a bit difficult to get up to speed (especially fighting all these pros here at Nintendo Power). It soon became incredibly fun, however. I've learned to stop worrying and love the chaos! —CHRIS I.

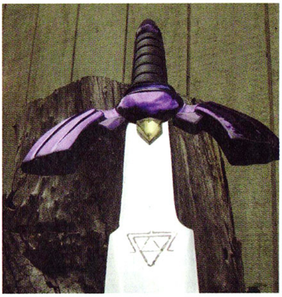
SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

I still play the original Super Smash Bros. on N64 to this day, but I have to admit that Melee just didn't hook me for one reason or another. Brawl fixes everything that I didn't like about Melee, and makes the things I did like even better. For the first time in eight years, something has replaced the original Super Smash Bros. as the game I can't wait to play every single day. —TOM H.

FANDOM

Forging the Master Sword

A reader and her dad take fandom to a whole new level and create a weapon worthy of Link himself.



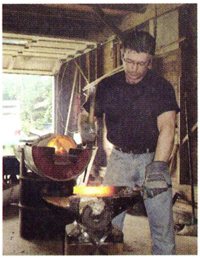
Anyone who's a fan of the Zelda series has at some point dreamt of having a Master Sword of his or her own, but Link's signature weapon is hard to come by, and few of us possess the technical know-how to actually make one. Lucky for reader Katie J., her dad Jerry does, and after a couple of years of hard work, he has created a "hand-forged, fully functional replica" of Link's legendary blade.

The process wasn't easy, and the materials involved aren't exactly commonplace. The blade, made from 5160 steel, had to be forged by hand, which is a physically demanding and potentially hazardous process, as evidenced by the gloves Jerry is wearing. The handle is made from hardened applewood wrapped in blue-dyed leather, and the cross-guard is made from aluminum covered with a coat of reflective paint that causes it to shift between blue and purple, "like Link's sword." Jerry even put amber gems on the blade to make it as close a replica as possible.

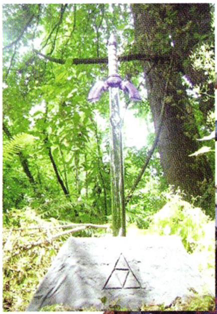
Of course, no man could do this alone, and Jerry had "a bit of help from other artists in the family," including Katie herself. She made the sword's "stone" pedestal out of plaster and foam so that the sword would have a place to rest. (We can't say for sure, but we'd guess that her inspiration was the Pedestal of Time from The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.)

Katie and Jerry's Master Sword is so impressive that it's actually gained a bit of a following on the Internet, and she tells us that her dad "has had many requests from fans to sell them a hand-forged Master Sword." Unfortunately for all you rabid fans, they can't actually sell their replicas because the Master Sword is copyrighted by Nintendo. With all the time and effort required to make one, we don't expect Jerry would be too excited about having to fill hundreds of Master Sword orders anyway.

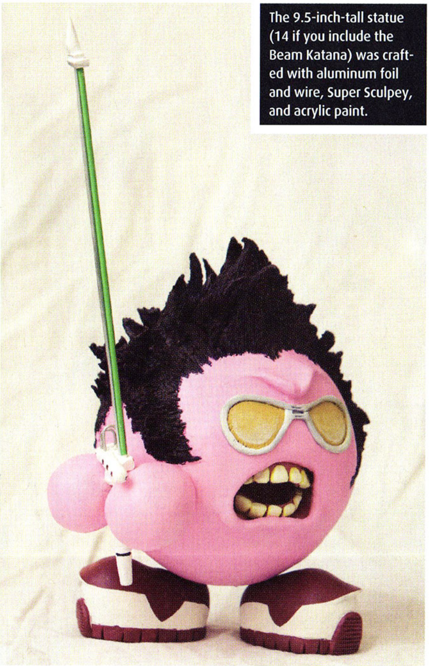
Katie calls the sword a "masterpiece and labor of love," and we definitely agree. Though many have tried, few have succeeded in making a quality replica of Link's weapon, and Jerry's is one of the best. With the Master Sword done, we can't help but wonder what he'll be up to next. Perhaps some of Link's other equipment? We can think of a few uses for a Hookshot.... —TOM H.



As Jerry can attest, blacksmithing isn't much easier than it was 500 years ago.



The sword rests in Katie's pedestal, waiting for one deserving of its power to claim it.

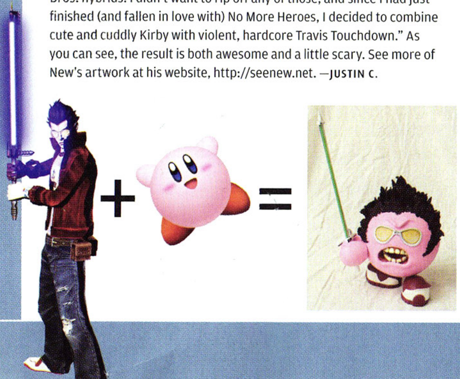


The 9.5-inch-tall statue (14 if you include the Beam Katana) was crafted with aluminum foil and wire, Super Sculpey, and acrylic paint.

FANDOM

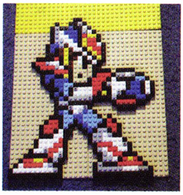
Pink Fury

Kirby and No More Heroes—two great franchises that taste great together? Apparently so, at least in Chris New's eyes. "I'm a student at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia," explains New. "This sculpture was created for an assignment in my 3-D design class that required us to render a character in three dimensions that we had come up with on paper. We could either come up with our own character, or we were allowed to parody or hybridize two different characters. [I immediately] thought of Kirby's Smash Bros. hybrids. I didn't want to rip off any of those, and since I had just finished (and fallen in love with) No More Heroes, I decided to combine cute and cuddly Kirby with violent, hardcore Travis Touchdown." As you can see, the result is both awesome and a little scary. See more of New's artwork at his website, http://seenew.net. —JUSTIN C.



FANDOM

LEGO Man



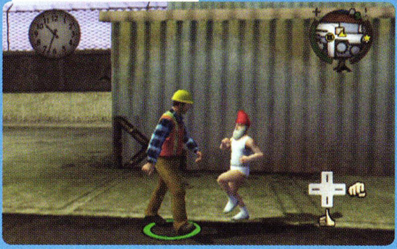
We've seen a lot of LEGO-ized video game characters lately, but we never get tired of them because they're almost always impressive. Take reader Jason E.'s creation, for instance: "When I can't play video games, I like to create with LEGOs," says Jason. "Here's a picture made out of LEGOs of one of my favorites, Mega Man." Good job, Jason—you've made our resident Mega Man superfan, Chris H., very happy. —JUSTIN C.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

Readers just couldn't resist sending in several "It's a trap" captions for Volume 226's LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga screenshot—see some of the more creative captions below. This month, we go back to school. See? School is cool! All current and former students should email their best captions to **screentest@futureus.com.**

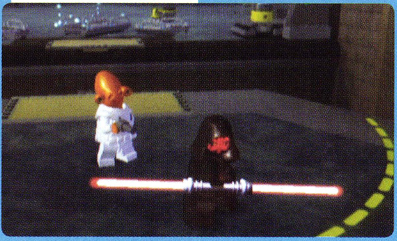
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



"Hey, you haven't seen a bear run by in gnome clothes, have you?"

HERE'S OUR CAPTION.
Think you can do better?

VOLUME 226'S SHOT



"Only one guy showed up for the ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Darth Mall." —ERIC DREHER

"It's a trap! Yes! I've always wanted to say that about a trap of my own!" —NICK P.

"I'm sorry, Darth, but we'd be living a lie. You're a Sith Lord, and I'm a fish." —ROKRIN

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NEXT MONTH

Expect a full diagnosis on Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2, as well as exclusive hands-on impressions from the Wii version of FaceBreaker. We'll also have the latest on Star Wars: The Force Unleashed and much more!

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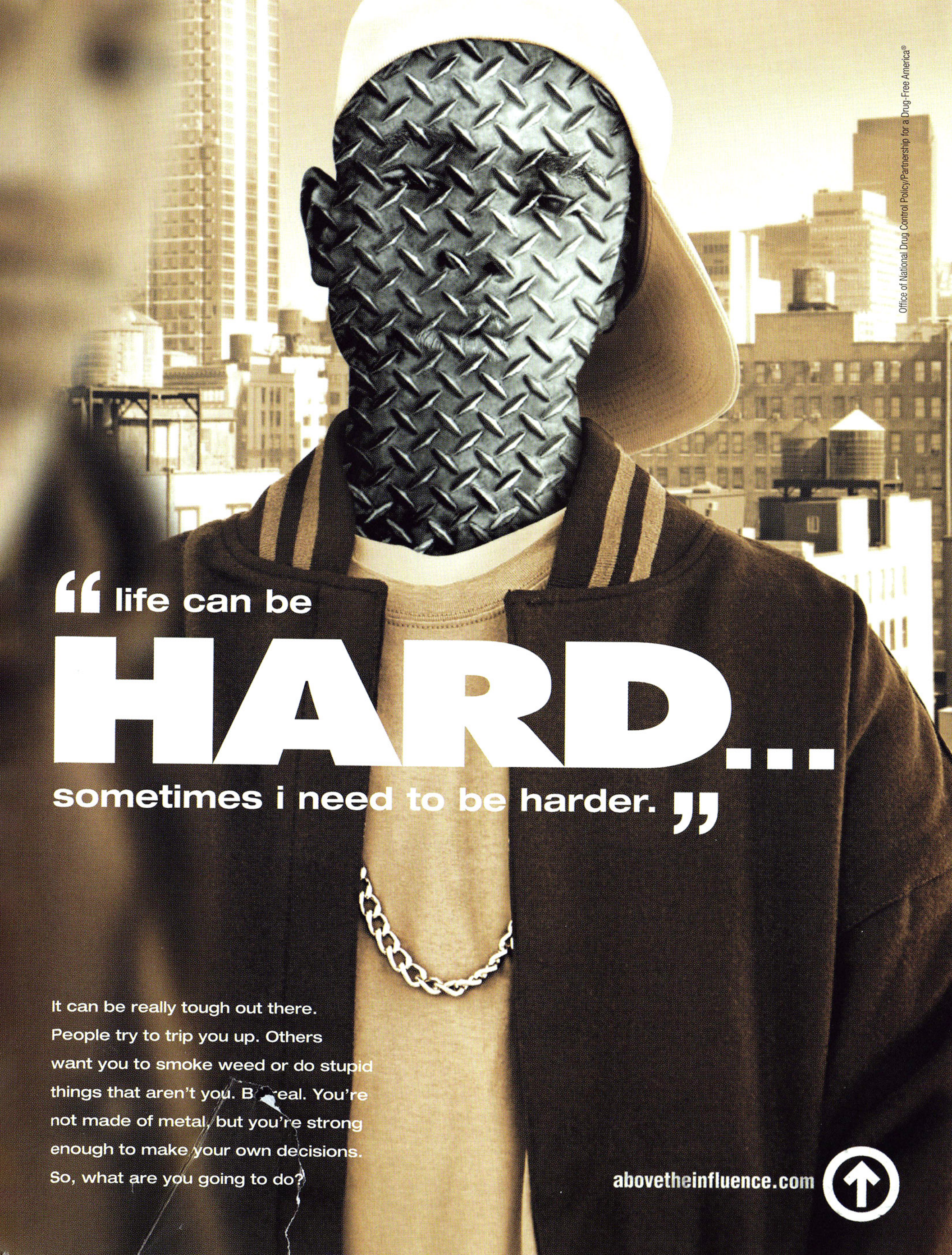

“life can be HARD... sometimes i need to be harder.”

It can be really tough out there. People try to trip you up. Others want you to smoke weed or do stupid things that aren’t you. Be real. You’re not made of metal, but you’re strong enough to make your own decisions. So, what are you going to do?

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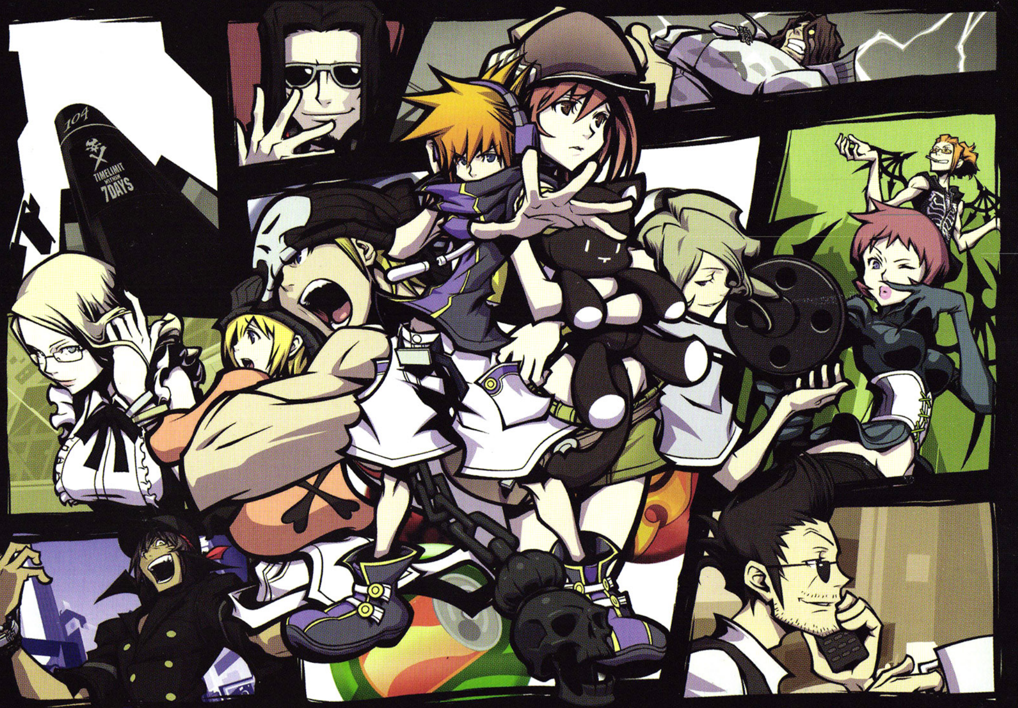
LET THE GAME BEGIN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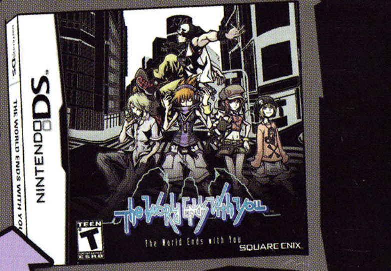
TIMELIMIT WITHIN 7DAYS

The World Ends with You™

The World Ends with You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TEEN T ESRB
SQUARE ENIX

HITS THE STREETS
APRIL 22ND

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

NINTENDO DS™

SQUARE ENIX

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